BEM

The comics news fanzine.

23

30p

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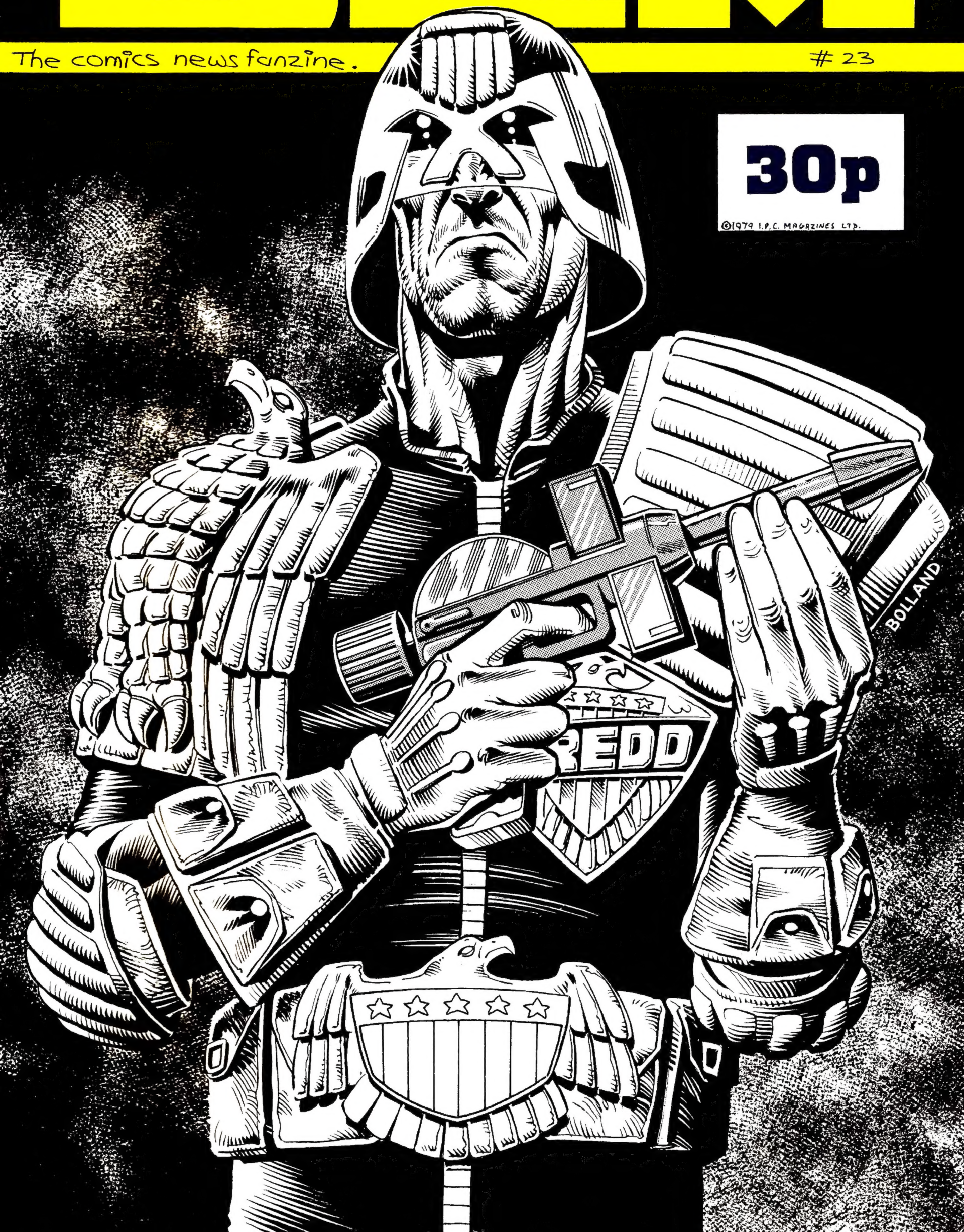

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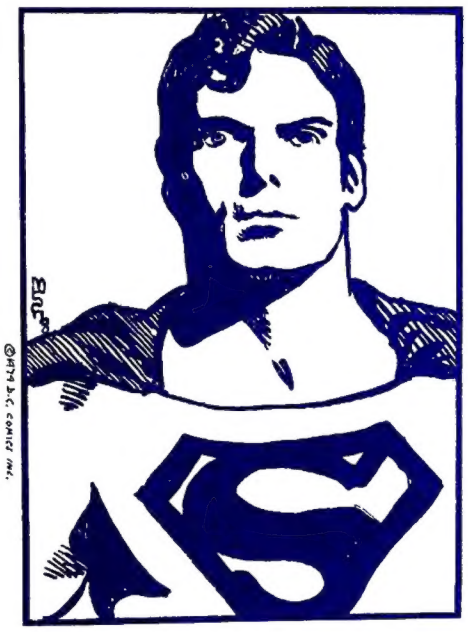


Back issues: The first eleven issues of Bem and Bem-13 are sold out. Bems 12 and 14-16 have a 15p cover price, Bems 17-19 have a 20p cover price, Bem-20 a 25p cover price, and Bem-21 on a 30p cover price. For one back issue please add 7p towards postage; add 3p for each following issue. If you are buying at least four Bem back issues and subscribing (at £1.50 for 5 big issues), then the back issues are post free--or you can buy all ten Bem back issues for £2.00, or get them and a 5-issue subscription for £3.30. An "add-on" subscription for seven issues of Fantasy Trader, in addition to five issues sent out with Bem, is a further 50p. Make cheques & postal orders payable to M. Lock, please.

Martin Lock.

Notes: Contributors, including people whose letters are printed in Reaction, are sent a complimentary copy of the issue of Bem their work is in--if they have a subscription, it is extended by one issue. Please therefore enclose your full address with any letter; if you want a personal reply, remember to enclose return postage. Comments in Reaction identified in "/( )/" are by Mike Cruden, unless otherwise indicated. Letters, magazines for review, art, enquiries, ads, contributions, etc should be sent to Martin Lock.

NEWS AT BEM

And so another issue of Bem makes its debut. Chris Ash gives us double rations this time with his visit to Paul Gambaccini's home, and also a meditation on the comics scene further on in the issue; Howard Siegel presents an extra-length "Made In America" showing the progress of comics from the low point of the mid-fifties until the vintage year of 1967; Lew Stringer tells us all about "The Rise And Fall of Power Comics", which explains the illustration just below; Kathleen Glancy zeroes in on the strange brain-rinsing of Quicksilver in AVENGERS #176; K. Williams lets us know why he's very probably giving up 'Sigh'; Ed Sallis is on hand to report on the fandom scene, of course; and Reaction expands to seven pages of tiny type, including some in-depth discussion on "Superman -- The Movie". And of course there are the latest cover reproductions and news both from America and Britain -- but you already knew that, right?

Like 97% of fandom, I've seen the Superman movie--and enjoyed it greatly. It doesn't follow the comics versions slavishly, but it's none the worse for that --the "spinning time backwards" gimmick used to revive Lois is a strange idea, difficult to explain, while if Krypton was destroyed thousands of years ago, how come Jor-El knew that Earth would be at a state of development when a Superman would come in handy? Luthor was larger than life, but more acceptable than the Batman TV villains he's being compared with -- and his henchman Otis, while not exactly an elevating character, made an amiable foil.

But I'm sure the discussion will continue in Reaction next time, unlike perhaps the debate on stereotypes of homosexuals, and the treatment of "gays" in the media, which seems to be drawing to a close now. But with Mike Cruden's guidance, I'm sure new topics equally as intriguing, if not as controversial, will soon crop up. And this time Mike's old friend Ian Penman, who used to adit a fanzine called ORACLE in those far-off days before COMIC MEDIA NEWS was hatched, came by while Mike was at work on one batch of letters --and leapt right in to help with the answering. Since Ruan Lanihorne (whose 'Unamerican Activities' column will be back next time), Ed Sallis and I were also involved at one time or another, it's even more of a two-way (24-way?) discussion than before.

But I really must thank Brian Bolland for his excellent cover for this issue of Bem--any reader of IPC's 2000 A.D. will know of Brian's excellent work on Judge Dredd there, and I think he has done a great job for us too. Anyone who disagrees should place himself under arrest, and report to the nearest traffic island.

But what about next time? Well, I'm glad to report that Pete Scott has sent in an opinion piece on Close Encounters (you must admit we don't rush into print with our film items to cash in on passing fads), which I'll send out for illustration as soon as I have the time to work out how much space it'll take up--but the main item, guaranteed to appeal to all discerning readers of the current crop of Marvels, I won't reveal yet. There is a subtle clue on this page, though -- somewhere!

Two more items to cover: due to some comments that the print in Bem was getting to be too small to be easily read, I've enlarged the size of the print, except on the letters section and, in this issue, the review section; it does mean slightly less reading, but I hope to cut slightly the number of ads in Bem to compensate. Also, after being linked with Bem for the last six issues, FANTASY TRADER is again now going its own separate way. It will, however, continue to be sent out free with Bem to all Bem's subscribers in the UK; as it is now going to appear monthly though, as opposed to Bem's five-a-year achedule, to get every issue you'll need to subscribe; for details, check out 'Fan-Things' on page 25. Gez Kelly is FT's new editor --when I heard that he was planning a monthly high-circulation adzine, to be sent out free with all major fanzines, it seemed so similar to my plans for FT (only on a bigger scale) that an amalgamation of the two projects into the new FT was only logical.

So; there we go. Bem-24 will be out at the start of June; the deadline for reviews is 4th May, but letters should be sent in as soon as possible. -ML

Comic News

DC are declaring ALL OUT WAR -- this is the title of the new Dollar Comic, bi-monthly as are all such books, to alternate with G.I. COMBAT. Edited by Murray Boltinoff, artists lined up include George Evans, Jerry Grandenetti, E.R. Cruz, Dick Ayers & Romeo Tanghal.

The official title of the new science fiction Dollar Comic is TIME WARP--it will be edited by Joe Orlando, with as associate editor Jack C. Harris. Mike Kaluta is doing #1's cover; stories by Denny O'Neil, Mike Fleisher, Bob Rozakis, Marc DeMatties, Mike W. Barr, and George Kashdan are already in the works; artists involved include Rich Buckler & Don Newton.

ALL NEW DC
FROM THE SHRUNKEN CITY OF KANDOR, SUPERMAN BRINGS "DEATH OUT OF A BOTTLE!"
40¢
NO. 496 JUNE
SUPERMAN
ACTION COMICS
IT'S ALL YOUR FAULT, SUPERMAN!
YOU CARRIED SUPER-DISEASE GERMS FROM HERE TO THE OUTSIDE WORLD!
BECAUSE OF YOU, EVERY LIVING THING ON EARTH IS ABOUT TO DROP DEAD!
©1979 D.C. COMICS INC.

The Dollar Comics will contain ads soon; the new titles from #1, the others from G.I. COMBAT #216, DETECTIVE #486, ADVENTURE #465, SUPERMAN FAMILY #197, and UNEXPECTED #193. There will be 51 pages of art per book, plus a 1 or 2 page text--the equivalent of a 17-page comic for 33 cents.

WORLD'S FINEST #258 is the final Dollar issue; it reverts to the 40c format, and will feature Superman/Batman team-ups, edited by Schwartz & drawn by Buckler. It was the poorest-selling of the hero $1 books; replacing it is FIVE STAR SUPER-HERO SPECTACULAR, featuring Green Arrow & Black Canary, Shazam, and Black Lightning from WORLD'S FINEST (Hawkman loses his strip), Wonder Woman from ADVENTURE (to make room for the ads), and Plastic Man. The editor is Ross Andru.

WORLD OF KRYPTON begins its 3-issue run in April (that's a July cover-date, calendar fans), using material originally scheduled for SHOWCASE. Paul Kupperberg wrote 'em, Chaykin & Anderson were the artists, and Bridwell's the editor.

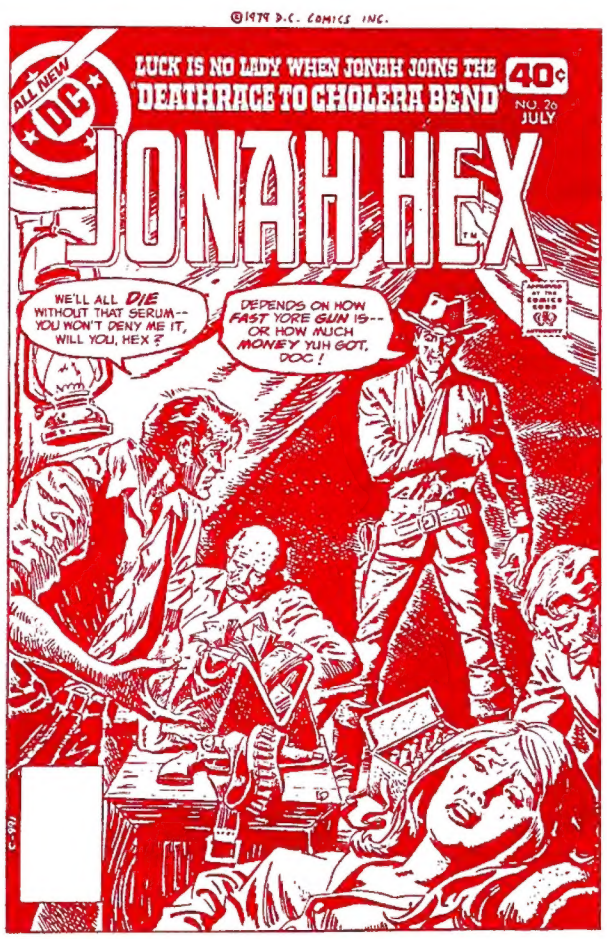
ACTION COMICS #500 will be a special Dollar Comic, with no ads, for "Superman's Life Story", originally planned to be a tabloid last year. And DC SPECIAL SERIES #17 is also an ad-less $1 book for "The Original Swamp Thing Saga", reprinting issues 5, 6 & 7 of Swampy's own book--a new wraparound Wrightson cover's planned. And on sale in July is the first issue of SWAMP THING's revival, #25, edited by Paul Levitz. Another revival is SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE, with #15, on sale in May, edited by Jack Harris. The idea is apparently to help get rid of the still considerable backlog of mystery stories.

Vince Colletta is resigning as DC's Art Director to devote his time to full-time inking. He will continue to work exclusively for DC. His duties will be absorbed by Joe Orlando and the other DC editors.

DC is publishing a series of Digest Comics (handy initials, yes?), with 96 pages for 95 cents. The first issue of JONAH HEX WESTERN TALES, edited by Ross Andru, contains his stories from ALL-STAR WESTERN #11 and WEIRD WESTERN #23 & #24, plus Billy the Kid from ALL-STAR WESTERN #7, the origin of Scalphunter, and the Adams illustrated El Diablo tale from WEIRD WESTERN #13. THE BEST OF DC #1 stars Superman in stories from issues 149 ("The Death of Superman") & 265 of his own comic, and issues 196, 300 & 442 of ACTION. The second issue will feature Batman, #3 the Super Friends, and #4 Rudolph. SECRET ORIGINS OF SUPER-HEROES and, edited by Paul Levitz, WAR DIGEST, are one-shots due out in July; the digest books will be 95% reprints, with new covers and occasional new material.

DC COMICS PRESENTS #10 has Superman flung back in time to team up with Sergeant Rock in World War II, by Cary Bates, Joe Staton & Jack Abel, who also did the sequel, #11, in which Hawkman guest-stars. And #12, by Steve Englehart, Rich Buckler & Dick Giordano, is Mr Miracle's long-awaited guest-appearance. A 2-parter with the Legion of Super-Heroes and then Superboy by Levitz & Dillin, involving Pete and John Ross, is also planned, as is a visit from Black Lightning, drawn by Rich Buckler.

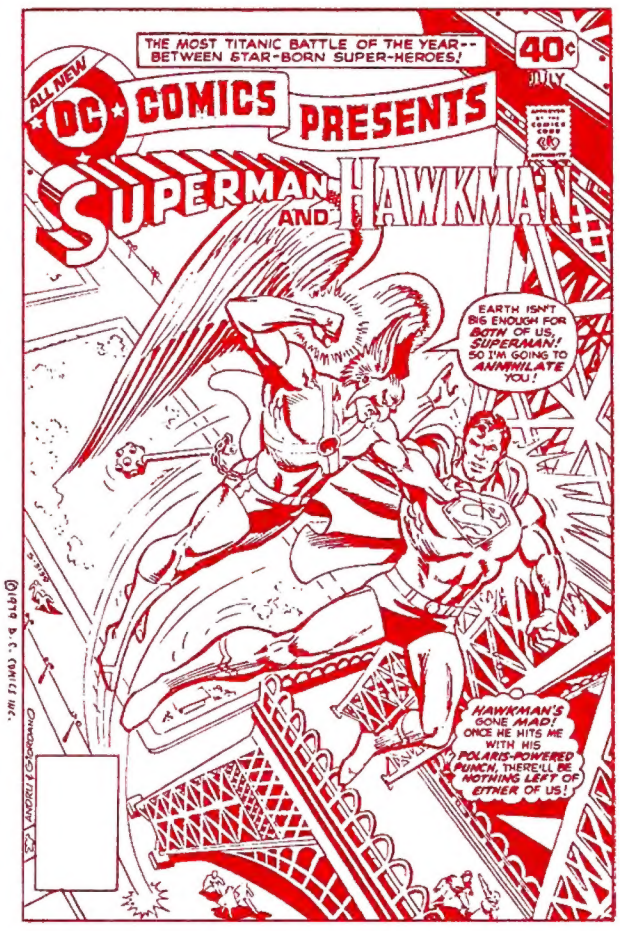
Jack C. Harris takes over HOUSE OF MYSTERY from Paul Levitz with #276, cover-dated January 1980.


©1979 D.C. COMICS INC.
ALL NEW DC
LUCK IS NO LADY WHEN JONAH JOINS THE "DEATHRACE TO CHOLERA BEND"
40¢
NO. 26 JULY
JONAH HEX
WE'LL ALL DIE WITHOUT THAT SERUM--YOU WON'T DENY ME IT, WILL YOU, HEX?
DEPENDS ON HOW FAST YORE GUN IS--OR HOW MUCH MONEY YUH GOT, DOC!

The annual JLA/JSA team-up, with no additional guest-stars, will involve a locked-room murder mystery in which one member dies; it's by the regular team of Conway, Dillin & McLaughlin.

BRAVE & BOLD #152 has Batman joined by the Atom, drawn by Jim Aparo; #153 is a fill-in by Cary Burkett, Newton & Bob Smith featuring Red Tornado, while Dr Fate (also drawn by Newton), Green Arrow & Metamorpho are also due soon.

WONDER WOMAN #257 is the last issue to be scripted by Paul Levitz, though he's plotted #258 for Paul Kupperberg to script; with #259, Gerry Conway takes charge of the exploits of the Amazing Amazon.


THE MOST TITANIC BATTLE OF THE YEAR--BETWEEN STAR-BORN SUPER-HEROES!
ALL NEW DC COMICS PRESENTS
40¢
JULY
SUPERMAN AND HAWKMAN
EARTH ISN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US, SUPERMAN! SO I'M GOING TO ANNIHILATE YOU!
HAWKMAN'S GONE MAD! ONCE HE HITS ME WITH HIS POLARIS-POWERED A PUNCH, THERE'LL BE NOTHING LEFT OF EITHER OF US!
©1979 D.C. COMICS INC.

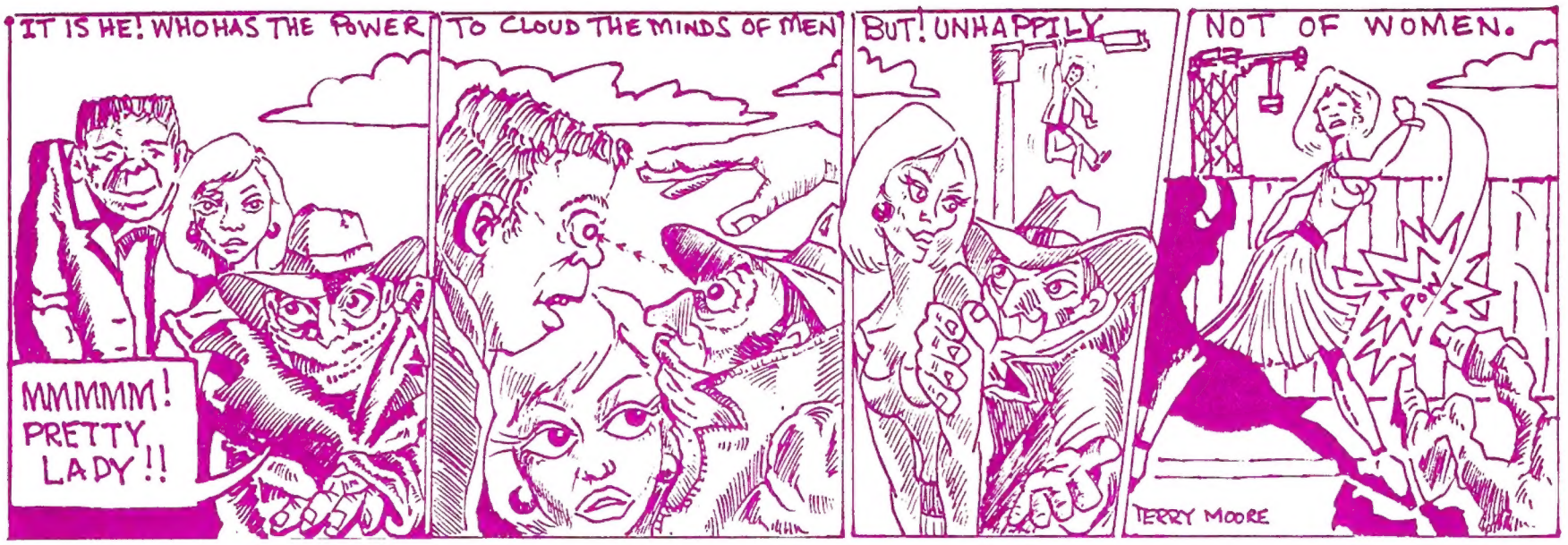
BATMAN #316-317 co-stars Robin, as the Dynamic Duo battle Crazy Quilt and Riddler; and the Teen Wonder's origin is retold in "Return of the Flying Graysons" in DETECTIVE #484, by Harris, Schaffenberger & Chiaramonte. Denny O'Neil, Don Newton & Dan Adkins contribute that issue's Batman tale, and Len Wein & Steve Ditko are responsible for the Demon strip; Bob Rozakis & George Tuska are working on an Alfred strip for DETECTIVE COMICS #486.

The 40th anniversary issue of SUPERMAN features "Let My People Grow", involving the enlargement of the bottle city of Kandor. Len Wein's first issue, #336, features the return of Rose and the Thorn--and #337 brings back Bizarro, Toyman, Brainiac, Terra-Man, and Metallo. Also, to tie in more with a certain movie, the SUPERMAN FAMILY exploits of Jimmy Olsen and Lois Lane will focus more on the Daily Planet, to which Clark Kent is due to return, at least on a part-time basis.

A WORLD'S FINEST lead story written by Gerry Conway, entitled "Whatever Happened to Firestorm?" is due soon; in that issue (fair exchange is no robbery), O'Neil writes the Hawkman & Green Arrow strips.

The SHOWCASE story featuring Deadman that never saw print will be in ADVENTURE #464; it runs to 23 pages, so the JSA adventure is shorter than usual, with the spotlight on Wildcat, by Levitz and Staton, who in future will be inking his own pencils on this feature.

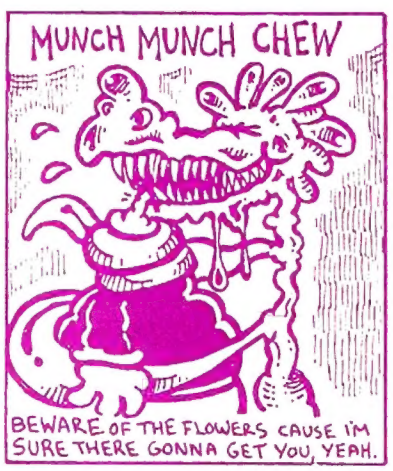
Simon & Schuster are starting a series of hardback anthologies of DC stories --the first has 256 pages of war tales, the second features romance, and then in the autumn comes an SF anthology.


IT IS HE! WHO HAS THE POWER
MMMMM! PRETTY LADY!!
TO CLOUD THE MINDS OF MEN
BUT! UNHAPPILY
NOT OF WOMEN.
POW
TERRY MOORE

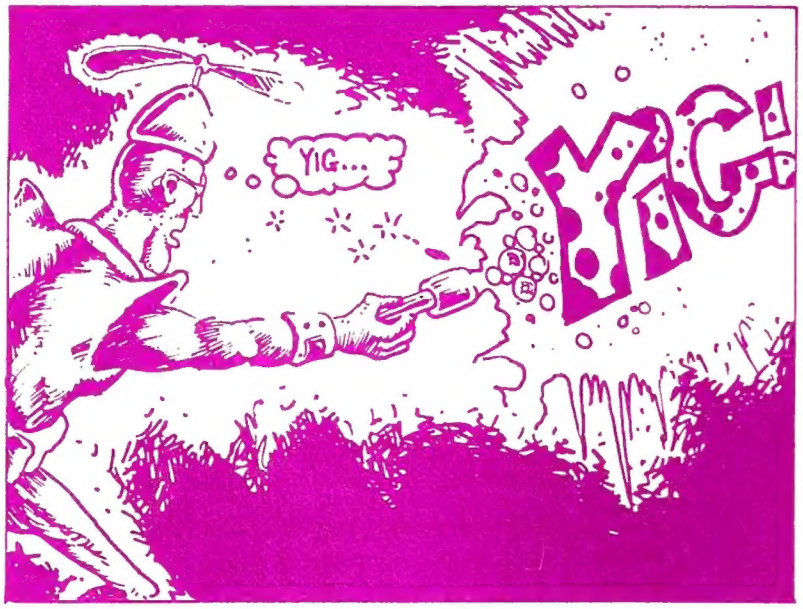
NASTY COMIX
©LASTO79

HELLO LITTLE FLOWER, MY YOU ARE LOOKING LOVELY TODAY.

ERK!


MUNCH MUNCH CHEW
BEWARE OF THE FLOWERS CAUSE I'M SURE THERE GONNA GET YOU, YEAH.

ULTRA MAN
YIG.
WORDS + ART BY MARTIN LONGLEY.
1-79

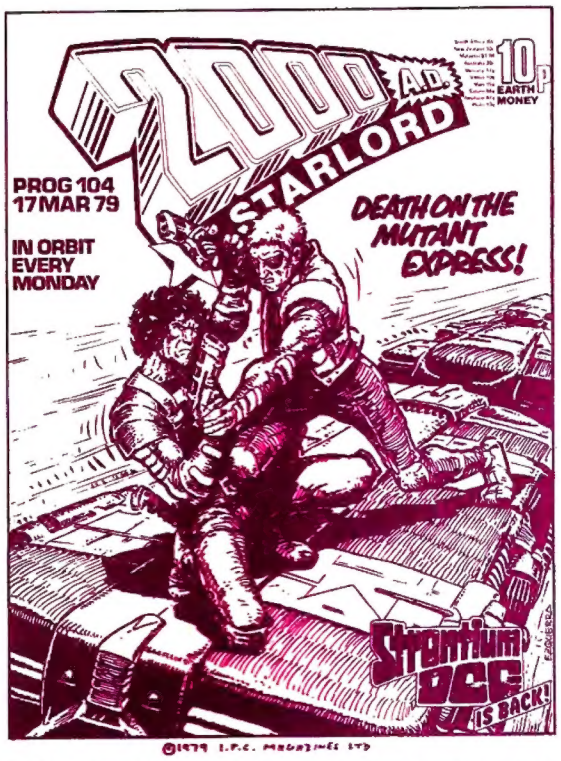

YIG....
YIG!

MEANWHILE...
YIGYIGYIGYIGYIG

COINCIDENTALLY...

YIG!
YIG.

CONCLUSIVELY...
RIP
THE END..



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2000 AD: Mike McMahon's Judge Dredd strip in prog 100 was his last for that feature --he's moving to Ro-Busters, which he and Kevin O'Neill will share. Joining Brian Bolland on Dredd, although both Gary Leach and Brett Ewins have done fill-ins, is Ron Smith, who is new to IPC. In fact, he used to work for D.C. Th*ms*n, but was a great fan of 2000 A.D., so defected!

Kelvin Gosnell is giving up the editorship of 2000 A.D. and Tornado, to become script editor of the whole juvenile group, as soon as he can find a replacement for himself on Tornado -- which can't be Nick Landau, as he's resigning to devote more time to "Forbidden Planet", the shop he's one of the owners of. Steve McManus is 2000 A.D.'s new editor-elect, and hopes to increase the sf film and TV coverage (such as the recent "Superman" feature), with contributions by Nick Landau and Kev O'Neill.

Strontium Dog is back from prog 104, for an indefinite run -- he gets the centre-spread. It's now the policy to allow the artists to colour their own work--Carlos Ezquerra will do this from ≠105 on.

Prog 107 has a colour back-cover pin-up of "Fergee", from the Judge Dredd strip, by Brian Bolland.

Robo-Hunter's current assignment ends in prog 112, though he will return. Rick Random begins a 6-parter in prog 113, to test his potential -- the tale's rather less action-orientated than most of the 2000 A.D. strips.

A seven-part back-cover series on "The House of the Future" by Bill LeFever is due to start in prog 109.

Judge Dredd is still 2000 A.D.'s most popular strip, followed by Ro-Busters (though Ro-Jaws' memoirs, based on the plot of Black Beauty, weren't quite as popular); the "Judge Caligula" story is due to be wrapped up soon after about 20 episodes, and after this he's to be given some shorter, more "ordinary" stories, to re-establish him as a lawman on a motorbike--these shouldn't run for more than three or four weeks each.

The 2000 A.D. Sci-Fi Special for this summer goes on sale on 26th May, with 64 pages, 8 of them in colour, and a painted cover by Brian Bolland. All the material is new, including a Judge Dredd 10-pager featuring the return of the Ape Gang and quite a few features, including photos in colour of the SF film "Meteor". It's a training/proving ground for new artists, as usual.

Kelvin Gosnell has edited a 1980 2000 A.D. Annual, and a Dan Dare one again--there's also to be a STAR LORD Annual.

TORNADO: Since Tharg has discovered that Earthlets are interested in other types of comic as well as 2000 A.D.'s SF, he's kindly created this new treat for us, and transformed mild-mannered Dave Gibbons into a superhero to run it, so expect lots of photos of "The Big E" in his natty new costume performing feats to stun and amaze his colleagues at IPC! The theme of the comic is heroes--past, present & future. There's a post World War II strip, one of a Mars/Earth war, a 1920's detective, a story about E.S.P., a samurai story (replaced in ≠4 by a Roman story), a wild boy strip starting in ≠3, and a spoof superhero strip by Kev O'Neill on the back. TORNADO ≠1 is launched on 19th March.

Southern TV are doing a documentary on Tom Tully, scripter of Dan Dare, BATTLE-ACTION's Spinball Wars & Johnny Red, Roy of the Rovers, and TORNADO's Wolfie Smith.

MARVEL UK: Marvel were harder hit than most other companies by the lorry-driver strike and severe winter, and are losing 4 weeks of cover-dating to "catch up". THE HULK, the new comic, came out on 1st March -- you'll have seen it probably by now, but for the record the line-up is:

The Hulk: drawn in week 1 by Dave Gibbons --the strip is more like the current HULK MAGAZINE series, putting Marvel's Hulk into TV-Hulk type situations.

Black Knight: written by Steve Parkhouse and drawn by John Stoke.

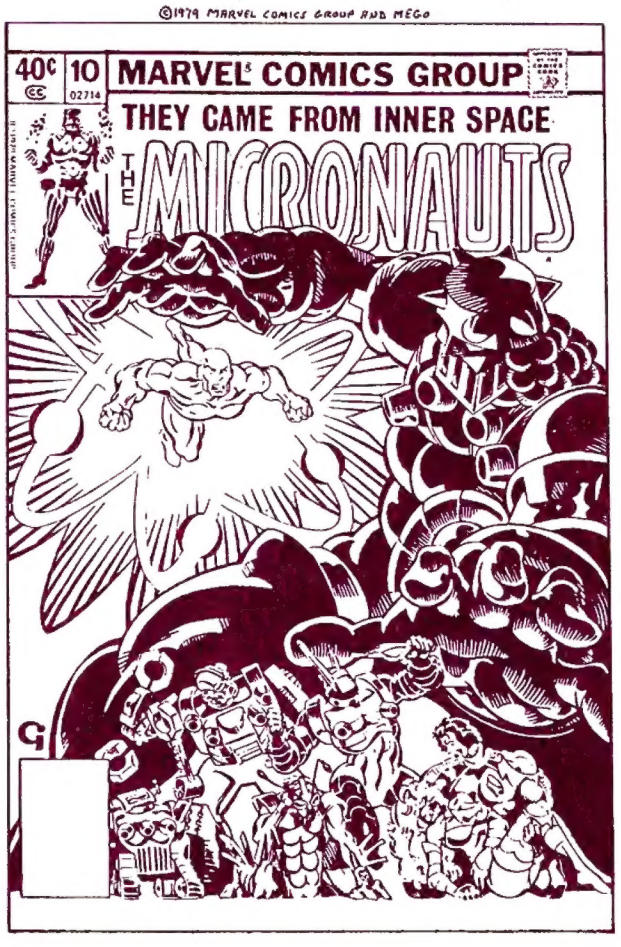
Nick Fury: written by Steve Moore (the two Steves share all the scripting) and drawn by John Richardson.

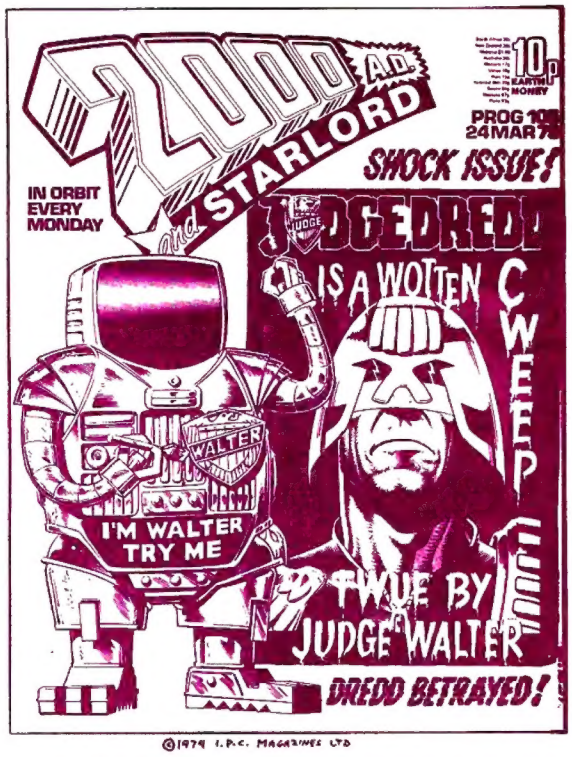
Nightraven: by Parkhouse & David Lloyd.

Ant-Man: early Lee & Kirby reprints.

Hulk: the reprint series moves over from MARVEL COMIC (or MIGHTY WORLD OF MARVEL, as was), starting in ≠5. Issues 2-4 have a teaming of Hulk, the Beast and Mimic that got left out of the reprinting sequence up until now. Hulk is replaced in MARVEL COMIC by Godzilla. And Cap Britain will turn up in the Black Knight strip later on. The free gift with ≠1 is a Hulk Album--with ≠2 come 5 free stickers, then you have to buy packets of stickers from your newsagent. The first story in the album is a photo-adaptation of the Hulk TV pilot, the other two are new stories drawn by Spanish artists.

The Marvel UK offices seem an extremely busy, hectic place these days...





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To put it mildly, the Marvel distribution scene is a mess. Dez Skinn wants <u>any</u> comic he's reprinting taken off the list, but that doesn't leave World Distributors the 15 per month they want. The titles appearing from April to June we'll have to take as they come, but starting in July the line-up of ten monthlies is:

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE	AVENGERS
SPIDER-WOMAN	X-MEN
SHOGUN WARRIORS	IRON MAN
CAPTAIN AMERICA	DEFENDERS
THOR	TARZAN

And the bi-monthlies added on are:

June/August	July/September
GHOST RIDER	MARVEL SPOTLIGHT
MACHINE MAN	DAREDEVIL
POWER MAN	MARVEL SUPERHEROES
MARVEL PREMIERE	?
SGT. FURY	?

At the moment there don't seem any other suitable bi-monthlies for July, as most of the cancelled titles come in that month --JOHN CARTER is <u>un</u>-cancelled after a short break, and might be one possible bi-monthly to go in there. Dez would like THOR, AVENGERS and X-MEN to come off the list as soon as possible, if replacements can be found.

To complete the stock-taking, these are the <u>non</u>-distributed monthlies:

MASTER OF KUNG FU	CONAN
BATTLESTAR GALACTICA	HULK
FANTASTIC FOUR	MICRONAUTS
MARVEL TEAM-UP	SPIDER-MAN
MARVEL TALES	SPIDEY
PETER PARKER	STAR WARS

There are very few 40 cent bi-monthly books (Marvel put up the price with the May cover-dates) non-distributed; DR STRANGE is a "June/August" book, while MAN-THING and SUB-MARINER aren't as yet definitely scheduled. The other colour bi-monthly book is the 60 cent WHAT IF? --also "June/August". Marvel's recent cancellations have severely unbalanced the schedules.

And here are the cancellations, with the last issue's number in brackets:

TOMB OF DRACULA (≠69, April)
CAPTAIN MARVEL (≠62, May)
BLACK PANTHER (≠15, May)
MS MARVEL (≠23, April)
RED SONJA (≠15, May)
INVADERS (≠40, May)
JOHN CARTER (≠24, May--but see above)
GODZILLA (≠24, July)
KID COLT (≠229, April)
RAWHIDE KID (≠151, May)
HOWARD THE DUCK (≠31, May)
NOVA (≠25, May)
MARVEL SUPER ACTION (≠13, April)
MARVEL TRIPLE ACTION (≠47, April)

Now, all these cancellations need some clarification. The material for TOMB OF DRACULA ≠70 & 71 will become a TOMB OF DRACULA ANNUAL this spring--and then the book changes to a bi-monthly black & white title, with Satana, by Fleisher (who is still working for DC as well--that's what being a free-lancer means) & Vosburg. The Drac strip will be by some fellows called Marv, Gene and Tom...

CAPTAIN MARVEL's feature continues for a few issues in MARVEL SPOTLIGHT, from a new ≠1, by Roger McKenzie & Pat Broderick.

BLACK PANTHER goes into MARVEL PREMIERE for three issues, starting in ≠51.

MS MARVEL joins THE AVENGERS formally.

RED SONJA will appear in SAVAGE SWORD.

INVADERS ≠41 & ≠42 will appear instead as INVADERS ANNUAL ≠2 this spring.

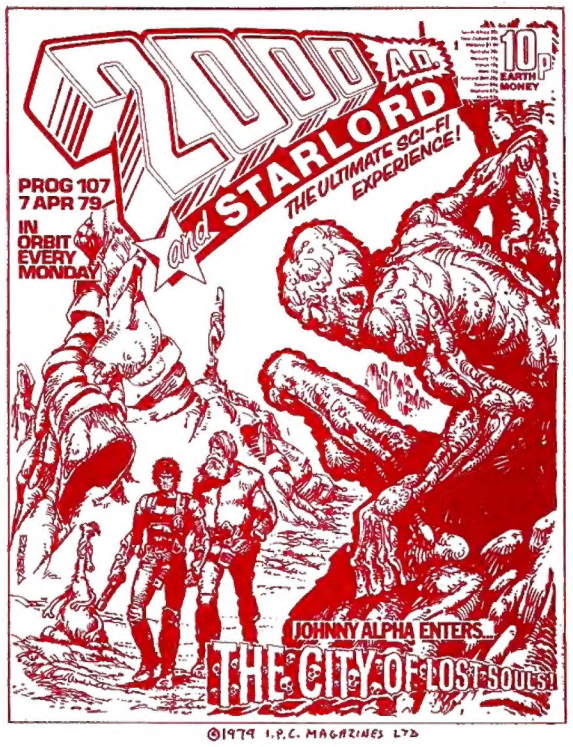
GODZILLA's demise is due to contractual disagreements with Toho Productions; two Ditko-drawn issues should appear somewhere under the old "Fin Fang Foom" name.

And HOWARD THE DUCK becomes a black & white magazine, as previously announced, while NOVA after ≠25 (May) disappears into a mammoth FANTASTIC FOUR space epic that was originally to be a cross-over. And those last two reprints are lasting one more issue than originally planned -- as the former reprints CAPTAIN AMERICA ≠111 by Steranko, and the latter has a new Steve Ditko cover, why not indeed?

MARVEL PREMIERE ≠49 stars The Falcon, by Mark Evanier & Sal Buscema, and ≠50, written by Ed Hannigan, features Alice Cooper, as a tie-in with his latest record album. An upcoming MARVEL PREVIEW is to star Moon Knight by Doug Moench.

The villain in this year's SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL, by Marv Wolfman & John Byrne, is Dr Octopus--the plotline continues in the PETER PARKER ANNUAL, drawn by Buckler.

Gene Colan returns to DOCTOR STRANGE as "permanent" artist shortly.



TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL ≠4, with The Thing & Black Bolt, is by David Michelinie & Jim Craig. AVENGERS ANNUAL ≠9, featuring a battle against Arsenal (not the football team) is by Bill Mantlo and Don Newton. X-MEN ANNUAL ≠3, featuring Arkon, is by Chris Claremont & George Perez now.

KING CONAN, like THOR THE MIGHTY, will be a 60 cent quarterly colour book, from Roy Thomas & John Buscema.

Owing to Marvel's new "work for hire" contract, Mike Ploog has withdrawn his work on the WEIRDWORLD Super Special--and John Buscema is starting from scratch. ≠10 will now be STARLORD by Moench, Colan & Palmer, with ≠11 (out May 22nd) and ≠12 (out June 19th) the WEIRDWORLD issues.

SPIDER-MAN ≠200 will be a 60c issue.

"Marvel's version of HEAVY METAL", only (says Rick Marschall) understandable, is likely to be called ODYSSEY; the launch date's unsettled, but it will have 64 to 80 pages monthly for $1.50, with comics, illustrated fiction, and such, including contributions by European artists.

Pocket Books are issuing a Capt America strip reprint paperback -- it'll contain AVENGERS ≠4 and his first couple of years in TALES OF SUSPENSE. There'll also soon be a Cap novel, and a second Hulk one, to be followed by a volume of short stories starring The Avengers, the X-Men, Doctor Strange, and the Hulk.

Gene Colan has drawn a short Hulk tale for the colour magazine--Rudy Nebres will be the regular inker & colour finisher for the Hulk lead strip.

The 40c WEIRDWORLD title will be put out soon after the two Super Specials; Pat Broderick is pencilling WEIRDWORLD ≠2.

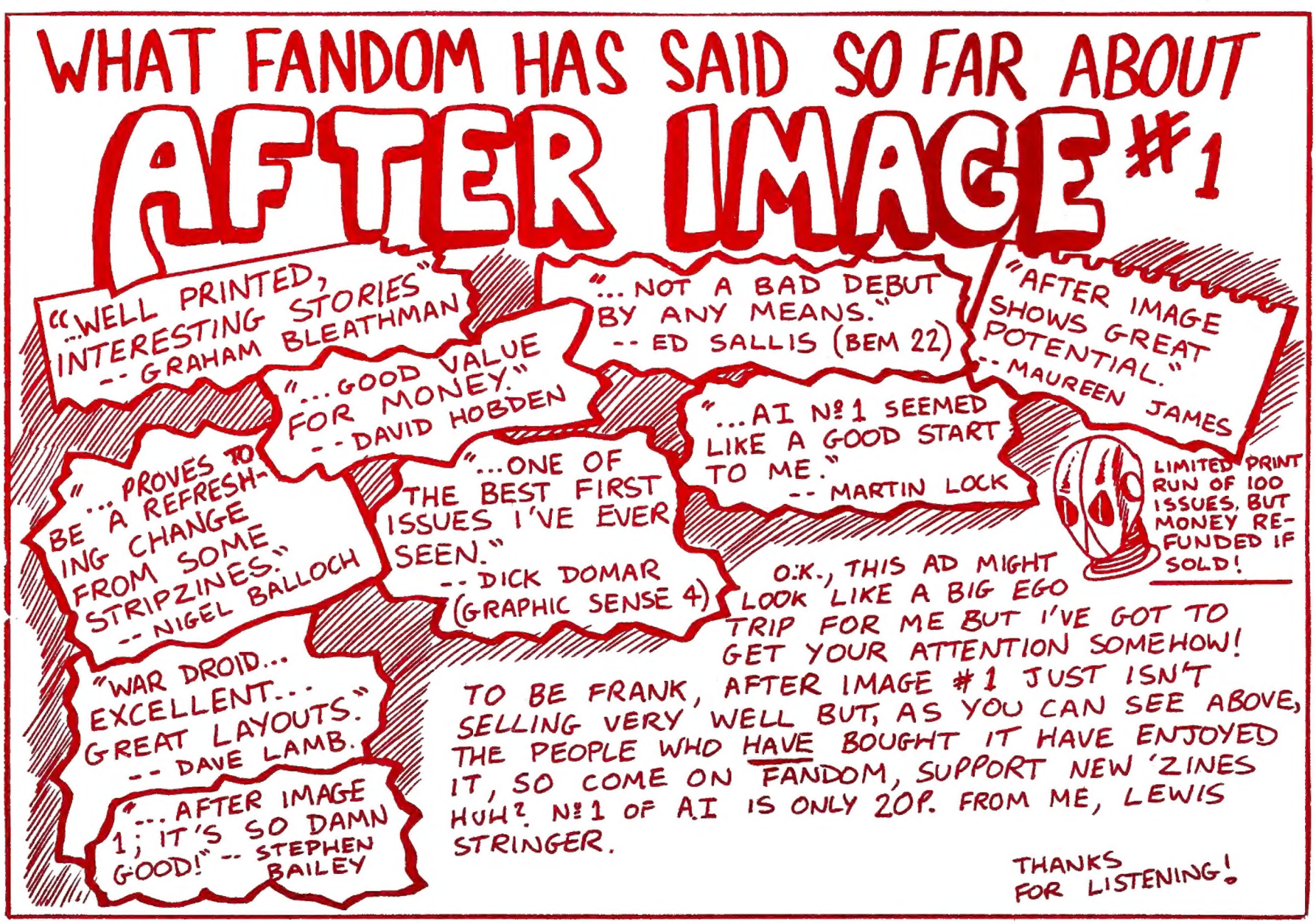
Moon Knight is the star of an upcoming MARVEL PREVIEW. Al Milgrom is BATTLESTAR GALACTICA's editor from ≠4 on.

Steven Grant is writing a script for DEFENDERS to tie up the loose ends left on OMEGA THE UNKNOWN. George Perez will take over pencilling MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE with ≠56--John Byrne takes on the FF with ≠209.

Mike Golden is taking a leave of absence from MICRONAUTS after ≠12, for 5 issues--Howie Chaykin will do those issues, with Al Milgrom tentatively scheduled to ink them. Howie has already completed ≠13 & ≠14--they deal with Bug on his homeworld of Kaliklak, and are reportedly "Very Gil Kaneish, very science-fictiony."

Chris Claremont has written a 2-part STAR WARS story--it'll be pencilled by Pat Broderick. Chris is also editor of CAPTAIN AMERICA (with ≠237) and DR STRANGE (≠38).

Thanks go to all Bem's news sources--and especially to Steve, Richard, Colin, Nick, Bill, Jack, John, and Reg! -ML


WHAT FANDOM HAS SAID SO FAR ABOUT
AFTER IMAGE #1
"...WELL PRINTED, INTERESTING STORIES" -- GRAHAM BLEATHMAN
"... GOOD VALUE FOR MONEY." -- DAVID HOBDEN
"... NOT A BAD DEBUT BY ANY MEANS." -- ED SALLIS (BEM 22)
"AFTER IMAGE SHOWS GREAT POTENTIAL." -- MAUREEN JAMES
"... PROVES TO BE A REFRESHING CHANGE FROM SOME STRIPZINES." -- NIGEL BALLOCH
"...ONE OF THE BEST FIRST ISSUES I'VE EVER SEEN." -- DICK DOMAR (GRAPHIC SENSE 4)
"... AI Nº 1 SEEMED LIKE A GOOD START TO ME." -- MARTIN LOCK
LIMITED PRINT RUN OF 100 ISSUES, BUT MONEY REFUNDED IF SOLD!
"WAR DROID... EXCELLENT... GREAT LAYOUTS." -- DAVE LAMB.
"... AFTER IMAGE 1; IT'S SO DAMN GOOD!" -- STEPHEN BAILEY
O.K., THIS AD MIGHT LOOK LIKE A BIG EGO TRIP FOR ME BUT I'VE GOT TO GET YOUR ATTENTION SOMEHOW!
TO BE FRANK, AFTER IMAGE #1 JUST ISN'T SELLING VERY WELL BUT, AS YOU CAN SEE ABOVE, THE PEOPLE WHO HAVE BOUGHT IT HAVE ENJOYED IT, SO COME ON FANDOM, SUPPORT NEW 'ZINES HUH? Nº 1 OF AI IS ONLY 20P. FROM ME, LEWIS STRINGER.
THANKS FOR LISTENING!

MADE IN AMERICA

Last time I gave a brief outline of the "Silver Age" of comic books, that period following World War II. Historians consider it a bleak era. Replacing the super hero were a collection of diluted subjects --several of which caused a negative reaction from the public. It took desperation to open the portals for the most productive decade ever; fishing for ideas that might prove salesworthy, National Periodical Publications, then the reigning publisher, looked back and gambled. The year was 1956. The title was SHOWCASE. The issue was number 4. A scarlet and yellow character, winged head and foot, introduced the "new" FLASH, and thus began the "modern age". Slowly, an issue at a time, an experimental title or two, another resurrection from the forties...and the cornucopia soon flowed in torrents.

1957: The same title, SHOWCASE, offered something new, something old, and something again. Kirby's CHALLENGERS OF THE UNKNOWN made their debut, LOIS LANE went solo for an issue, and FLASH got another try-out.

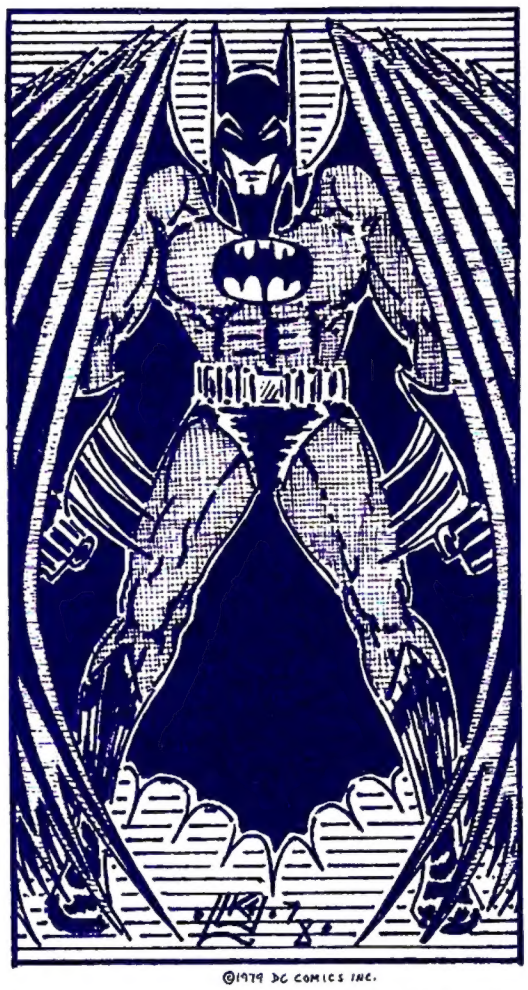
1958: Adam Strange, "The Thinking Man's Super-Hero", was introduced in SHOWCASE's "Adventures On Other Worlds". A much praised entry, Adam had a Hall of Fame group guiding his career for several years with Gardner Fox scripting, and Carmine Infantino & Murphy Anderson on pencils & inks. After his cancellation in MYSTERY IN SPACE, the editorial offices received a constant flow of requests for Adam's return--though it is doubtful if his first run can ever be duplicated in quality.

1959: Again NPP stood out, by introducing SUPERGIRL in ACTION #252. The modern age GREEN LANTERN received his SHOWCASE baptism in #22. Radio Comics offered THE FLY and PRIVATE STRONG/SHIELD, both by Simon & Kirby, their last team effort. The latter, officially titled "The Double Life of Private Strong", was yet another patriotically garbed hero in the Simon & Kirby tradition; but evidently the cold war was not enough of an adversary subject to keep him going beyond two issues.

1960: Marvel had not yet made its move. KID FLASH was debuted, as was ELONGATED MAN in FLASH issues. The Justice League appeared for the first time in BRAVE AND BOLD #s 28-30--the line-up was so illustrious that not even the inept artwork of Mike Sekowsky could dampen its impact. The first experiment with a different size was tried that year via SUPERMAN, in an 80 page "Giant" annual containing all reprints. Mention must be made, for the sake of completeness, of two short-lived features, SEA DEVILS and ATOMIC KNIGHTS. The former were an undersea commando-like group, the latter survivors on a world devastated by an atomic holocaust who don knight's armour. The metal had been molecularly strengthened by radioactivity, giving the group a degree of immunity and strength as they attempt to establish a new life for the planet's remaining inhabitants. The BLACK HOOD, MLJ's Man of Mystery during the Golden Age, returned (with a blue hood) in THE FLY for a few issues. Charlton presented CAPTAIN ATOM in SPACE ADVENTURES #33. And GREEN LANTERN and the J.L.A. were awarded their own titles before the year was out.

1961: We would have to wait until November for the "Marvel Age" to begin, with THE FANTASTIC FOUR. The earlier months introduced NPP's HAWKMAN, Radio's JAGUAR and FLY-GIRL, and ACG's JOHN FORCE, MAGIC AGENT. All the new DC stars had their origins reprinted in the 25 cent Giant SECRET ORIGINS, GREEN ARROW joined the JLA, and a monumental issue was on the stands in September. "The Flash of Two Worlds" in FLASH #123 introduced to modern readers the Golden Age Flash, thereby opening the way for the return of the WWII stars. It received the first "Alley Award" by organised fandom as the most important comic book of the year. On the other side of the coin, Charlton tested reader gullibility by giving us a western hero, GUNMASTER, who wore no less than 10 pieces of pistolware; 1961 thus ended on a comical note.

1962: Marvel began to roll. In January, Henry Pym began his career of many names,



costumes and powers with ANT-MAN (TALES TO ASTONISH #27), followed two months later by IRON MAN in TALES OF SUSPENSE #39. The early Iron Man wore a bulky, grey, almost robot-like metal suit which made me wonder how even the slightest bit of agility could be exerted by its wearer, Tony Stark. Sub-Mariner was a "guest villain" in FANTASTIC FOUR #4, and HULK began his first 6-issue run in the same month. THOR started in JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY #83 in August, and the HUMAN TORCH spun off for a series of his own in STRANGE TALES, often co-starring The Thing. NPP offered AQUAMAN in his own title in February, after a 3-issue tryout in SHOWCASE--despite a long career in the forties and early fifties, the latter were the first covers Aquaman ever appeared on. In FLASH #129, a brief recap of the Justice Society of America's last ALL-STAR story appeared, continuing that title's efforts to interest new generations of readers in the old super-heroes. The by now famous Legion of Super-Heroes began their own feature in ADVENTURE #300. Gold Key went out of its mold by having a super-hero of its own--DR SOLAR, MAN OF THE ATOM, whose water-colour covers could not make up for a bland and evenly panelled group of stories inside. The green-skinned doctor first donned his red costume in the fifth issue of the book. A set of three issues with reprints of Harvey's old heroine, THE BLACK CAT, arrived in a thick 25 cent format in July. The "new" ATOM went into his own title in the same month, after a three-issue SHOWCASE tryout -- and I've saved the best for last. 1962, web-minded afficionados, was the year SPIDER-MAN debuted in the last issue of AMAZING FANTASY. Stan Lee and company were on their way!

1963: The year of the following firsts--MAGNUS ROBOT FIGHTER, AMAZING SPIDER-MAN, METAL MEN, AVENGERS and X-MEN in premiere issues of their own titles. The original DOOM PATROL began in MY GREATEST ADVENTURE, eventually to take over the whole book and have the title changed. FLASH and FANTASTIC FOUR had their first annuals, while STRANGE TALES ANNUAL #2, a very hard to find item at conventions now, started the Marvel syndrome of having two heroes fighting each other with the Human Torch battling Spider-Man. That "Master of the Mystic Arts", DR STRANGE, entered via the aforementioned STRANGE TALES, issue #110. ECLIPSO entered in HOUSE OF SECRETS #61, and stayed until #80. ANT-MAN became GIANT-MAN, and later shared TALES TO ASTONISH for a lengthy run with THE HULK, when the title went the same dual route as TALES OF SUSPENSE with IRON MAN and CAPTAIN AMERICA. BRAVE & BOLD began its team-up pattern with in #50 Manhunter From Mars and Green Arrow, though in later years it was to become the Batman's own private teamup turf. And the highlight of the year was the first annual visit to Earth-1 by the Justice Society, in J.L.A. #21 and #22.

1964: In March Captain America came back, albeit in a block of ice, to the amazement of THE AVENGERS--he would stay, and soon become the reigning leader of the group. DAREDEVIL came into being, with art by Bill Everett, Joe Orlando, and, starting with #5, Wally Wood. Patience was rewarded when HAWKMAN finally got his long-deserved title--two triple tryout runs in BRAVE & BOLD, a guesting in ATOM #7, another 3-issue tryout as a back-up feature in MYSTERY IN SPACE, and finally the editors believed the mail. Incidentally, the Joe Kubert-illustrated stories from this time are considered classics. BLUE BEETLE, that persistent, non-powered character from the early 40s, once again came to life. Numerous publishers, a plethora of hack artists handling him, and often droll stories could not keep his phoenix from consistently rising from the ashes. This time it was Charlton, who kept the string of ineptness going for a several year series. Readers had to wait until Steve Ditko took over in the late 1960s before the name BLUE BEETLE would mean something. MARVEL TALES #1 annual came out, with reprints. This issue too is a rare find, for some reason. For amusement, Radio issued a "new" SHADOW; the first issue had him in the famous clotch hat and cape on the cover, but blonde and bespeckled inside. The second issue kept the yellow hair, but garbed him in a green and blue costume, even though the interior had him in civilian clothes. The third to eighth issues had him costumed, and with dark hair; the only things that remained the same were the terrible Paul Reinman & Co art and the childish stories. Zatanna, now a member of the JLA, went through a number of DC titles looking for her father, the famed golden age magician. She sought help from HAWKMAN, ATOM, and GREEN LANTERN in their own magazines, and Elongated Man in DETECTIVE, until the end of her quest was retold in JLA #51, dated February 1967.

1965: ACG introduced its only two super-

heroes, Magicman in FORBIDDEN WORLDS ≠125 and Nemesis in ADVENTURES INTO THE UNKNOWN ≠154; both lasted for 17 issues. They met each other but once during that time, and spent most of the story fighting. That elemental oddity Metamorpho appeared in BRAVE & BOLD ≠57; that title also showed as the Teen Titans in ≠60. Radio Comics created THE MIGHTY CRUSADERS, changed THE FLY to FLY MAN to MIGHTY COMICS, and brought back many of the old MLJ heroes in an overcamp style that killed the stable, including a different Comet, The Fox, Firefly, Shield, Mr Justice, Steel Sterling, Hangman, The Web, and Captain Flag, to name but a few. SON OF VULCAN, an attempt to ride on THOR's popularity, was tried by Charlton, unsuccessfully. Two golden age stalwarts, Dr Fate and The Hourman, were starred in SHOWCASE ≠55 & ≠56, while BRAVE & BOLD ≠61 & ≠62 Star Man and Black Canary were featured. Nick Fury and his S.H.I.E.L.D. agents began in STRANGE TALES, while The Sub-Mariner got his own strip in TALES TO ASTONISH. Black Bolt and his Inhumans made their appearance against the FANTASTIC FOUR, and Marvel ended the year for themselves by issuing their COLLECTORS' ITEM CLASSICS. NPP gave us the golden age WONDER WOMAN in her ≠158 issue; Mark Merlin became Prince Ra-Man in HOUSE OF SECRETS 73-80; we said a sad farewell to Adam Strange as Ultra, the Multi-Alien took over MYSTERY IN SPACE for its final half-year. Tower became a publisher of note with THUNDER AGENTS and UNDERSEA AGENT, and Wally Wood at his best since his early and unpolished EC days. Many said that their 64 page, 25 cent editions were ahead of their time, and contributed to the short careers of all Tower products. Harvey also entered the superhero field with a combination of excellent Al Williamson and Reed Crandall reprints to go along with new superheroes in a series of "Thriller" titles. Simon & Kirby reprints (Three Rocketeers) and Bob Powell's "Man In Black Called Fate" were in there too. Beast Boy joined the Doom Patrol in 1965, and would later guest with the TEEN TITANS after his patrons were killed in an atomic blast. Charlton's Action-Hero series got started in full gear with JUDOMASTER and a new version of CAPTAIN ATOM (by Ditko). It was a prolific year--with an even greater one to follow, as a result of the Batman appearing on American television.

1966: At NPP, HOUSE OF MYSTERY introduced a unique concept in "Dial H For Hero". By a twist of a telephone dial, Robby Reed became an assortment of superheroes during his run, including Quality's Plastic Man. The Spectre, after an intensive banner campaign on all NPP titles, was resurrected in SHOWCASE.

At Marvel, Henry Pym switched from Giant Man to Goliath in THE AVENGERS. The Black Panther and the Silver Surfer were introduced in FANTASTIC FOUR, long the proving ground for successful heroes.

At Charlton, THUNDERBOLT was added to the line. Later, the back-up feature in FIGHTIN' FIVE would switch places with that commando team, and the title would become PEACEMAKER. A Spartan helmet, backpack rockets and other weaponry would only make this addition a weak sister in the Action-Hero stable.

Harvey: The Thriller series was going full blast beginning with JIGSAW, an astronaut who is mistakenly snatched by aliens, and put together again with living tissue. He became another Plastic Man. SPYMAN was a super intelligence agent, whose hand, lost in a set-to, was replaced with an electronic/atomic device full of gimmicks--the Agency's HQ was in the base of the Statue of Liberty. PIRANA in THRILL-O-RAMA is a diver who touches a live undersea electrical cable, and finds that he cannot breathe above surface without sea water entering his system--he becomes a government Sub-Mariner, with two pet barracudas and a special boat containing a tank of water as his resting place. DOUBLE-DARE ADVENTURES was the first of two giant-sized entries; it featured BEE-MAN on both covers of its two-issue run. In the first one, he was a villain -- in the second, he became a good guy. He had hidden away in a rocket ship, and was attacked and bitten by alien bees. He returned to Earth as a human with bee-like characteristics. The Glowing Gladiator was the reincarnation of a champion Roman warrior, complete with armour and sword. Magicmaster was a genie who guided the son of a slain magician. UNEARTHLY SPECTACULARS featured Jack Q. Frost, yet another super-agent whose task led him into a freak accident--this time it was cold that turned him into a unique being. He could hurl the stuff with his hands, and solidify almost anything at a touch. He had to live in a deep-freeze when not in action. The back-up stories included Clawfang, an Al Williamson version of Conan; Earthman, a

Wally Wood take-off of Superman's origin; and Miracles Inc, another Wood idea that belongs in WITZEND, parodying all superhero teams. Left-over stories about The Three Rocketeers and Tiger Boy from earlier titles fleshed out the issues.

At Tower, a super speedster, Lightning, was added to the THUNDER AGENTS team to replace Menthor, one of the originals, killed for emotion-grabbing purposes. Dynamo, their No.1 hero whose strength came from a special belt, and Noman, who had the brain of a 70 year old scientist in a replaceable android body, were both given their own magazines.

Dell joined the bandwagon, with camp versions of classical favourites from the movies -- costumed versions of WEREWOLF, DRACULA and FRANKENSTEIN. They were too awful to explain.

M.F. Enterprises was a fly-by-night publisher who tried to use the CAPTAIN MARVEL name for a Carl (original Human Torch) Burgos creation. This android whose body came apart was soon taken to court, and put into limbo. Not satisfied with matching forces with Marvel, they added a back-up feature named "Plastic Man", and incurred the wrath of National, who caused a desist order to legally stop that idea. Shortly afterwards, MF gave up the ghost and left the industry.

There had been something for everyone in 1966. The highlight would have to be the revival of Simon & Kirby's 1954-1955 FIGHTING AMERICAN and Will Eisner's THE SPIRIT by Harvey in one and two issue revivals respectively. In the red-white-blue-yellow patriotic uniform so synonymous with S & K productions, Fighting American, this non super-powered but quite agile hero, complete with boy sidekick, romped through 5 and 6 page stories, using comical dialogue versus even funnier foes.

1967: Generally, the wave had crested. Many titles, no more than five issues old, were cancelled in 1967. The industry had "bottomed out", and was settling to normal levels that would remain as such for many years to come.

National gave METAMORPHO a girlfriend in Element Girl, and tried to impress its audience with a jungle superhero named B'WANA BEAST. Deadman was introduced in STRANGE ADVENTURES, and became a favourite. THE SPECTRE got his own title -- as did PLASTIC MAN. A successor to Jack Cole has never been found, hence Plas has always suffered through short revivals since the mid-forties. NPP even tried a BRAVE & BOLD issue with Batman in which PM became a serious hero, but here too they failed. Even Woozie Winks did not help, and the title waned after ten issues.

Over at Marvel, the golden age "All Winners Squad", Timely's only attempt at a team of popular heroes during the 40s, was reprinted in FANTASY MASTERPIECES ≠10. Several "specials" were published, with new material, including ones for AVENGERS and DAREDEVIL. The original X-MEN got new costumes; Marvel revived the old ME ghost cowboy, GHOST RIDER -- and the year would not be complete without Henry Pym changing again, this time back to Ant Man.

Charlton cancelled a lot of titles, but added some too. Nightshade, whose powers and their derivation were never fully explained, began her own back-up strip in CAPTAIN ATOM, while Ditko's The Question appeared in the "new" BLUE BEETLE. And Jim Aparo free-lanced with The Prankster, an interesting clown-garbed character who defied a 1984-like futuristic society on Earth, in the final issue of THUNDERBOLT.

Milson, a come-lately publisher, enlisted the retired C.C. Beck, who gave them a rotund, blonde young man whose encounter with an alien gave him the power to turn into FATMAN, THE HUMAN FLYING SAUCER at will. In a green and gold version of the original Captain Marvel's costume, he ate and rolled his way through three issues. A companion magazine had the self-explanatory title of SUPER GREEN BERET.

Miscellaneous items of note: Batgirl made her debut in DETECTIVE ≠359. Marvel introduced their Kree-spawned CAPTAIN MARVEL, having legally obtained the name; it would be several years before he would become the red and blue garbed alter ego of Rick Jones. Captain America quit THE AVENGERS for the first time: Gold Key brought back CRACKERJACK COMICS' old star from the 40s, THE OWL, a direct knockoff of Batman, then as now. Many other short-lived superheroes from Dell, Gold Key and other firms saw themselves cancelled--the year ended with the death knell ringing for Radio, Tower, Milson, and Charlton in their quest for a piece of the superhero market, though a few continue today with other genres.

To many, these were the most prolific years in terms of quality in the history of comic magazines -- I tend to agree. Volumes have been written about them, as well as countless articles for both the amateur and professional magazines. House organs from the major publishers, such as Marvel's FOOM, DC's AMAZING WORLD OF DC, and CHARLTON BULLSEYE gave much space to their products of the years 1957 to 1967, and rightfully so. -HOWARD P. SIEGEL

This one's for all you DC completists out there. Trip down to your airtight vault and check out that mint copy of FLASH #141. Take out the tweezers, tentatively turn the pages, and you'll come across a character called Mr Gambi--ostensibly a Jonn Broome creation.

"I'm particularly proud of this one", said Paul Gambaccini (the real Mr Gambi), showing me a copy of the aforementioned issue as we perused his comics and fanzine collection one Friday last September.

Paul's appearances on Radio and Television you will be familiar with. What few are aware of, though, is his involvement with the earliest days of American fandom. A member of the original Executive Board of the Academy of Comic Book Fans and Collectors, and Jerry Bails' successor as Executive Secretary, he also produced one of the original comics fanzines, FORUM.

Coming to Britain in 1970 to study at Oxford (where he gained a degree in Philosophy, Politics and Economics), he became the London editor of 'Rolling Stone' the same year, which almost forestalled a question I was going to ask. You see, the previous year an outfit calling itself Trans Oceanic Comic Co Ltd started publishing a British edition of R.S. (later to become 'Friends'). Their first issue featured a six-page interview with Stan Lee by Telegraph contributor Anthony Haden-Guest. The cover displayed a photograph of Sandy Denny eating breakfast. On the table before her are THOR SPECIAL #2 and MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #16. I've always wondered whether they were planted there for editorial purposes, but Paul thinks it likely that Sandy, God rest her soul, would have read such things. I mean, we all know that every rock musician in the 60's read Marvels, but... English female folk-rockers?

Although he dipped out of fandom in 1966 a survey of Paul's flat reveals sundry links with the past. The return of Mr Gambi for instance--3 pages and the cover from Flash #222 are framed and hung in the kitchen. Pride of place in the living room, however, belongs to a page of pencil drawings by Curt Swan, who lived in Paul's hometown of Westport, Connecticut.

Then there's all the recent Mike Friedrich stuff, including the latest ALTER EGO. While attending Dartmouth College in New Hampshire, Paul won an American History first with his thesis on EC, later donated to Roy Thomas for publication in ALTER EGO.

"The other subjects were so boring. One guy wrote about a speech Lincoln made addressing his troops. I was determined to win first prize--fortunately the tutors there were fairly hip

In the years between the publication of the latest A.E. and the previous one, EC comics have been fairly extensively expounded, so Friedrich decided to return Paul's treatise. The postage must have been astronomical -- the manuscript is enormous. Any British zine wanna make him an offer?

A large cardboard box was produced containing many of the earliest fanzines. For instance, Robert Jennings' COMIC WORLD, Biljo White's BATMANIA, Bob Butt's FAN TO FAN, Mike Vosburg's MASQUERADER, Jerry Bails' THE COMIC READER and CAPA ALPHA, Bill Spicer's FANTASY ILLUSTRATED, Jim Rossow's COUNTDOWN, a copy of the first ever Alley Awards (1962) and COMIC ART.

"COMIC ART was the offspin of XERO from which the 'All in Color for a Dime' book was extracted. XERO of course was an sf zine, and they had a big in-house rumble over whether comics were "pure" or not. It was generally agreed that they weren't very pure. Unfortunately most of my really early fanzines I loaned to Otto Binder, who was writing an article on them. But he died and I never got them back."

Paul was surprised to learn that, in the early 70's, Frederic Wertham himself had written a book on the pioneer fanzines, presumably in response to all the 'complimentary' copies he'd received villifying him. "I spoke to Wertham when I was writing my thesis. I really don't remember whether he was accessible to the subject then or not. It was a long time ago, over the phone from a New York public library. I always think of him as a sort of American Mary Whitehouse."

This led into a discussion of what you can and cannot get away with on British radio, both in theory and practise, which I shan't go into detail about here.

Anyway, it was through these zines (some in full colour litho, surprisingly) that Paul first learnt about EC comics.

"Even in my thesis (1970) it says "ACTION COMICS #1 is selling for $300." Well now it's selling for $3,000, $5,000. I bought EC's through the post in 1962 at 75 cents each. At one point I had about 150 of them; almost the entire post-code 'New Direction'...VALOR, PSYCHOANALYSIS, M.D., plus things like a mint ALL-AMERICAN #16 (debut of Green Lantern). I sold them all round about 1966. But even then we weren't in it for the money--although 'H.R.' was considered a bit of a crook."

The EC's have gone, but Paul still retains mint copies of every comic a missive of his appears in. They were mainly DC's (try early 60's BRAVE & BOLD and STRANGE ADVENTURES), but there's also FF #17.

"There's nothing I like better than seeing an old comic in mint condition. And they used to have more pages too, when they went down to 32 pages for 10 cents... and then went up to 12 cents. Julie Schwartz was one of the good guys. He inaugurated a lot of letter columns at DC, purely as a response to organised fandom."

When quizzed about the state of American comics today, I had to be honest. The promotions may have improved but the product has deteriorated, partly due to all the incoming fans.

"I'm not surprised. They're probably just trying to recreate the stories that made them fans in the first place."

Paul was curious as to the size of U.K. fandom. I showed him some current native zines and he was pleased to note that Johnny Craig and Wally Wood are still around. I mentioned Wally's inclusion in the recent 'Masters of Comic Book Art'.

"I should think so. I've never seen better comics artwork than the stuff Wood did for EC..."

At that point the 'phone rang. Broadcasting House had put through a call to warn Gambo that Simon Bates was going to ask him a question over the air (it was approximately 10.30 am) concerning the 'Guinness Book of Hit Singles'. It seemed as good a time as any to ask Paul what his contribution to that tome actually was.

Suddenly the laid-back disposition disappeared. "The book was my idea in the first place. Rock File #1 had already come out, but I said to Tim "Let's do a British Joel Whitburn"--we were both completists. Anyway, the Guinness organisation didn't want to put my name on the cover. Tim had to fight to get Mike (Read) and I on there even in small print."

I didn't discuss this with Paul at the time but, presumably, Guinness wanted to continue their family-type bylines (e.g. for R. & N. McWhirter, substitute T. & J. Rice) with the new venture. Considering, though, that both the Guinness and McWhirter families have had more than their fair share of tragedy, this need not necessarily have been a good omen for the Rices.

On that sombre note, I should like to apologise to anybody who approached this article anticipating the kind of in-depth, investigative, real research you guys have a right to expect. The fault is mine entirely, I used the pretext of this interview to bore Paul, for what must have seemed like hours, with my tedious views on music and radio (which I'm actually more interested in than comics). While I'm on the subject, did anyone catch Ian Penman, relatively recently, reviewing a Bowie concert on 'Rock On'? With thanks to Paul Gambaccini for his forebearance, and the use of his cassette recorder, this is your radio correspondent breaking transmission until next ish.

-CHRIS ASH

W.S.A.
No.1134

BOB SMART

SELLING OR TRADE

To obtain my first list for 2 years, SEND A LARGE S.A.E. to the above. Present stock totals approximately 20,000 comics, including No1 issues of FANTASTIC FOUR, SPIDERMAN, AVENGERS, X MEN, DAREDEVIL, CONAN etc. Right up to the latest imports, plus early D.C.Comics (100s of pre 1964 issues), including GREEN LANTERN No1, HAWKMAN No1, ATOM No1, AQUAMAN No1, EARLY BRAVE AND BOLD, SHOWCASE etc. Other items listed include EAGLES, T.C.21, DELL, GOLD KEY, WARRENS, W.D.L. plus numerous other publications and comic related items (Portfolios, Posters, Books, Fanzines (U.S.A.) SCI-FIC, Film, T.V. Magazines etc.).

Personal callers are welcome to call at my home address, at a mutually pre arranged day and time. This can be arranged either by phone or letter.

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BOB SMART

BUYING BUYING BUYING

Comic collections and choice individual items are always wanted (Marvel, D.C., Gold Key, E.C, Dell, Warren, Golden Age etc.).

I'm paying above average prices for certain items, especially earlier Marvel and D.C., Although all comics listed in any reply will be considered.

Reaction

Dave Harwood Without doubt this was the most impressive issue of Bem I've seen, and certainly one of the most enjoyable to date. I prefer the new size -- the old quarto size always seemed somehow rather anachronistic -- but that's neither here nor there.

The cover was...well, I liked it. With this type of artwork conventional critical criteria are all but redundant; you either like it or don't. Hunt has a genuine comic touch, and despite stylistic echoes of about half a dozen American underground artists of the late sixties/early seventies (he comes across mainly as a sort of cross between Crumb and Rick Griffin /(Naah, it's mainly Moscoso)/), the outcome is always recognisably and distinctly Hunt Emerson. Yes.

The interior art was much improved on some past offerings; there wasn't really a dud among the lot. Well, maybe a couple, but I'm in too good a mood to point them out. Maybe it has something to do with the fact that relatively few illos were of comic-book characters. One of the reasons I don't do spot illos of established characters, particularly super-heroes, is that they leave the artist so little scope, and almost invariably they come across as a watered-down version of some pro's style. Stylistic influences can of course be seen in other types of subject matter, but there it doesn't seem to matter so much, and it doesn't detract from the overall effect.

One illo I must mention specifically is Russ Nicholson's FT cover; the face was an excellent rendition of Patrick McGoohan, and the idea was good...but those hands! Not only were they anatomically inaccurate relative to the rest of the body, but they were quite simply grotesque. Russ, you really should take more care. Well-drawn hands are very important in figure drawing (or perhaps they merely seem so because so many people draw them badly), particularly when the rest of the illo is relatively realistic--as opposed to, say, comic-book 'shorthand'. I once filled an entire sketchbook with hands, and I still have trouble getting them right.

The funny thing is that we (I'm generalising) are so used to the way hands are drawn in Marvel & DC comics -- especially that peculiar double-jointed thumb Gil Kane is so fond of -- that when we see real hands drawn in this context, they somehow look wrong.

Hey, Martin, it was really nice to see a couple of decent-length articles, I hope it's a trend you intend to continue. Star Wars, though...again? That one looked as if it had been on the shelf for quite some time; however I still enjoyed it, perhaps because it's been a while now since I read an S.W. article.

I agreed with many of the points Mark Wordwriter made (that's not a real name, is it?) /(Harwood? Ho ho ho.)/, particularly his comments on the robot double-act and Ben Kenobi -- the latter had potential, but was underdeveloped, and hence unsatisfying. Funnily enough I didn't enjoy the film an awful lot, maybe because I'd already read Marvel's adaptation, seen countless short clips (albeit often the same ones) on telly, and perhaps had been led to expect too much by the publicity overkill. I preferred Close Encounters.

I do think though that this supposed 2001/Star Wars analogy is a non-starter. The two films are worlds apart ('scuse the pun), both in content and intent -- other than the sf tag and the arguable importance of the special effects. For my money, 2001 is by far the better of the two; I saw it three times in nearly as many months. It left me awed, mystified, emotionally drained; all the things Star Wars failed to do. I for one was very happy about Kubrick's 'mistake'. /(I thought that Star Wars was a much more rounded film than 2001, which, as Mark said, fell into the trap common with sf material, of believing that the plot, or in this case perhaps the medium, is the be-all and end-all.)/

I enjoyed the piece on Crumb, surely one of the great iconoclasts of recent years--he draws good too. Pete Scott is an excellent writer--a relatively rare breed in comics fandom--cramming in a mass of information and perceptive commentary, without losing his highly readable prose style. I mean, how many people can write an article about a character called Jughead, pointing out all its hidden merits, and have the reader seriously wondering what he's been missing?

Mind you, I did start out collecting comics with such gems as Casper, the Friendly Ghost, Spooky, and all his various chums, alongside the more usual titles like Superman and Batman. Then, somewhat later, I remember being a big fan of Herbie during the mid-sixties--I wonder whatever happened to him?

'Made in America' came as a pleasant surprise, because barely a week earlier I had been discussing with a friend how neglected the 50s were in fanzines, and particularly regretting that Steranko's History of Comics series never got that far. Perhaps my fascination with the period is simply that I know so little about it, and HPS did give some indication why it is generally ignored by fans. My only complaint about the article was that it was much too short.

And speaking of said History of Comics... What would David Lamb do without it...?

Coupla other mentions: It must be indicative of the current air of pessimism surrounding the comics scene that I was quite prepared to take Reg Uspatoff completely seriously. A sobering thought, and not an unrealistic one which makes it worse.

And this time Katholicity really was a waste of space. Why Kath wastes her obvious talents on such trivia I don't know. Ah, the vagaries of the female mind--now there's a sexist remark, if ever there was one! /(Strange, I thought that the best for some time.)/

On to Reaction and, cripes, what a boring letter I wrote last time, though at least I seem to be saying more that Mike can comment on or disagree with. /(I wouldn't say that...)/ I never realised how conceited that bit about letter-editing sounded--it wasn't meant to -- and Mike's subtle put-down was probably well-deserved. My memory too seems to be fading with age...I was reading through some old fanzines the other day (hey, howcum RDH Comics wasn't in your sales list, Mike? You gorn an' lost it or summat? It might even be quite valuable now, featuring as it does germinal Brian Bolland, including the first ever Little Nympho strip /(Same reason Armageddons and Fantasy Advertisers aren't there; I want to keep them.)/) and I came across a letter of mine in Armageddon 2 (1970, that was, I think) saying how fascinated I was by psychological investigations into the characters of super-heroes. Not only that, but I exhibited what appeared to be quite informed views on same, regarding (who else but) the X-Men. This does seem to make my comments last time rather silly, dunnit? /(Well, yes.)/

Actually, though the statement was perhaps an exaggeration, it was essentially true; these days I find I don't take an awful lot of notice of such considerations, particularly with newer characters. In fact I would go so far as to say that I probably buy many titles out of sheer habit or comics addiction, finding only a few really satisfying and/or stimulating. Strangely though I think my appreciation of the comic-book medium, as an art form and mode of story-telling, has if anything increased. Unfortunately, there are so few titles that even show a glimmer of the potential that does exist, though the real pity, or idiocy, is that I still buy this other junk. /(I continually find comics surprising. Just when I'm about to give up on a title, e.g. Dr Strange, up pops a winner. My main problems are FF and Spidey. I've got just about every issue of those titles, so it would be a pity to stop collecting them, but their quality varies so much from issue to issue (as opposed to the Hulk, which I gave up years ago.)/

So, my views have changed over the years, which is not so odd, tho' it might seem a little strange that one (me, that is) forgets ever holding those earlier opinions once they've been superceded. But then things always look different with hindsight; in a comics context it's amusing to see how often titles that were widely acclaimed on first appearance later become prime targets for criticism and sceptical probing into why they were so lauded in the first place. It happened with the Silver Surfer and those first GL/GAs, and sooner than most with Howard the Duck.

Alan Wright's earlier letter certainly added a bit of sparkle, and a somewhat wider scope, to Reaction. Les Chester's caustic comments will I'm sure do nothing to stem the controversy. I've no wish to get involved in the argument personally, at least not in the pages of a comics fanzine. All I will say is that it's a pity the controversy exists, and also a pity Alan seems to feel the need to be such a vehement, not to say aggressive, propagandist for 'Gay Liberation' with almost every word he writes. It's an understandable overreaction perhaps in the light of societal antipathy; I just wish he wasn't quite so humourless about it. As a PR man for the rights of homosexuals to simply be themselves I'd rather listen to Quentin Crisp any day.

Another person who is prone to write nonsense is Nigel Balloch. Several times now he's urged us to join his merry little band because through such an organisation he feels British fandom might actually be able to influence the comics industry. Does he seriously believe that to be true? Surely he must be aware that fandom is not representative of the tastes/demands of the vast bulk of comics buyers, and we are so small in number as to be utterly insignificant in terms of market influence. Ask, demand, petition all you want, Nigel; the publishers won't take a blind bit of notice unless it fits in with plans they already have. /(I did think that this wasn't as true as it was, what with many of the pros being former fans. Unfortunately, above the pros is one very hard-headed editor on one side, and a pack of businessmen on the other.)/

The best, if only, thing we could do, as someone else suggested, is to provide some alternative through our own efforts and try to sell it, thus proving to the big publishers that a market does exist for this kind of material -- or doesn't, as the case may be. Experiments like Dez Skinn's HoH and Mal Burns' Graphixus. Now that's something really positive the SoCE could do: form your own publishing company! I don't think that idea's any more outrageous than the stated aims of the SoCE I've thus fan seen.

Cat Yronwode Thanks for my freebie copie of Bem 22; i want you to know that i thoroughly enjoyed it. My insular american attitude (after all, comics, blues and rocknroll are our only contributions to the history of world culture!) left me unprepared for the depth of British fandom. I mean, i almost had heart failure over Uspatoff's little joke! The several different colours of ink were very charming, by the way. My only culture-shock came during the pages of bizarre (and i mean BIZARRE) pro and anti feminist and/or wimmin's raps in reaction. There was this vague and indefinable air of condescension towards women, women fans, and any man who might be on the less-than-100%-male end of things. I don't want to name names -- this is a tempest in a teapot across an ocean -- but, by goddess, we don't do things like that where I come from. Much. A case in point is THE HEROINES SHOWCASE--this zine started out (as THE HEROINE ADDICT) with a strong "good girl art" bias. Virtually every article would discuss the "attractive, tightfitting costume" of the heroine under discussion. Nowadays this ludicrous and patronizing attitude has been replaced by a rather straightforward pro-female focus. After all is said and done, i find that most male comics fans are lonely men who have both a fear and a desire to see women in fandom and in comics. Why, instead of writing strange and tortured letters to every fan whose name they see in the letters pages and can possibly construe to be female, don't they take a long look in the mirror and try to live by the golden rule? I'm not trying to be a bad sport, but i find all this talk about the derivation of the word "Ms" and the "7 demands" just annoyed me no end.

REQUEST: i belong to a crazy apa -- apa-i, the indexing apa--and I'm involved in a rather monumental attempt to produce a SPIRIT variorum index, listing all reprints of SPIRIT sections, as well as newer SPIRIT stories, and random SPIRIT artwork by Will Eisner. Can anyone tell me if The SPIRIT has been reprinted in Britain? I've been told there was an Italian edition, but so far have failed to locate it. Any information (publishers, dates, titles of stories reprinted, copies for sale, etc) will be gratefully received. And you'll get your name in print when the deal sees print. Oh, I've also been told about a Dutch reprint edition of the SPIRIT. Any info on that? /(I wonder if Cat knows about the reprints in Comic Media 10 ("Sound"--Sept 24 1950) and 11 ("The Leprechaun" --April 3 1949)? Yes, I'm sure he must do.)/

Alan Cookson As you will obviously know, it is a lot cheaper to buy the more expensive imports from the States yourself. So at least it cuts out the profits of the British dealers, which at times can be excessive. It seems to me this is the worst area for dealers ripping off the fans, when you can buy certain recent titles from the States for bugger all and charge the earth for them over here. The most glaring example is NOVA 17-19. Back issues of these from the States will cost about 20p, because they are so recent--bought in bulk, possibly cheaper. Yet Colin Campbell in his last list has them at £1.25, 75p, and 60p, and he condemns himself by only charging 30p for issues 4 to 15, still American 30 or 35 cent copies. Obviously he could defend himself by saying 4-15 are copies left over from his mailing list, and 17-19 are specially imported because of increased demand, but a friend could have brought me a case full from America at about 20p each. £1.25 for NOVA 17 is not a reasonable mark-up, in my opinion.

There are also other glaring examples of overpricing on this list; not really the obvious ones like GIANT-SIZE X-Men #1 @ £7.50, that's even $10 from American dealers, but MARVEL TEAM-UP #1 is only $8 in America, or £4, while on Colin's list it is £9. And I bet Colin can get them cheaper than most English fans, with all his contacts.

My other gripe is the different prices Colin is charging for American 35 cent and British 12 pence copies of recent distributed comics. Maybe to buy certain back issues from the States now would cost more than from over here, but don't for God's sake create a demand for expensive comics from America when they are in over-abundant supply in Britain already. Isn't it bad enough having to pay through the nose for recent comics that you have to buy from the States because they weren't distributed over here. Here are some examples from Colin's list: STAR WARS #2 @ 15p, or £1.50; CAPTAIN MARVEL #34 @ 30p, or £2; HOWARD THE DUCK #1 @ £1.75, or £8; WARLOCK #10-15 @ 40p, or £1.25; CONAN #45 & 49 @ 25p, or 75p; DEFENDERS #7 @ 75p, or £1.75.

You may be surprised to hear that I paid £13 for a NM copy of AVENGERS #2--but you have to pay prices almost as high for many relatively recent comics. I hate having to pay high prices for any comic, but I feel I'm getting better value with a well looked after rare old comic -- there must be thousands more copies of early Marvel Team-Ups, and even Conans, around than there are copies of AVENGERS #2.

In this country we have an absolute fetish about issues that were "non distributed" -- people give the earth for early Marvel Premieres and such, when most (not all) of these are relatively cheap in America, and go up only about a dollar a year, according to the Overstreet price guides. AVENGERS #2, however, was listed at $10 in 1975, $20 in 1976, $30 in 1977...and is now priced at $60. Not that I want to push the finance side of collecting --but let's get the relative values into perspective. Many importers are pulling the wool over our eyes about which comics are the best buy from an investment (and possibly enjoyment) point of view --don't get me wrong, I like Colin, and think he's usually fair, but this list I didn't think gave the best value, and I don't like the thought that it could start a new trend of pricing certain items ten times higher just because they have cents instead of pence printed on the cover.

Chris Ash First of all, congratulations on the two excellent Bem covers of recent memory (21 & 22), both of which were a vast improvement over previous efforts.

Alan Wright's letter reminded me that I had not sent a LoC on Bem-21. So, before I deal with him, I shall first address myself to Dave Harwood--in a half-ton safe dropped from a great height.

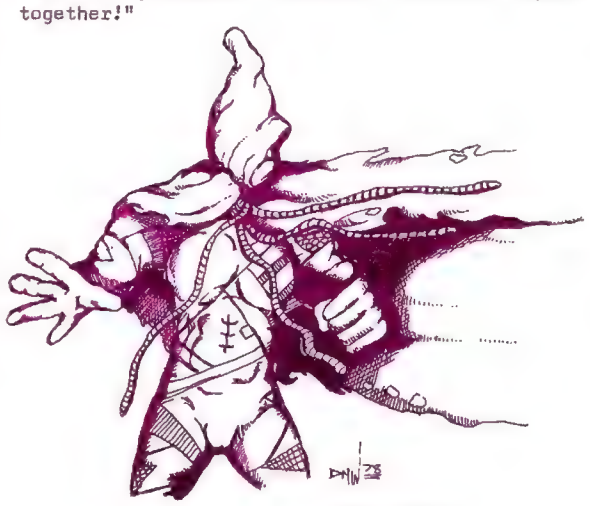
No but seriously Dave, stuff-strutting was never further from my mind in Bem-20. Turning out 15 pages, and colour overlays, of arrant drivel certainly isn't my idea of fun. The whole exercise was in the order of response to a challenge, as had been the earlier Groinstrain the Woodpecker series. I did learn, though, that the 13-page format was just as inapposite as the one-page-a-month system. When CF returns (and that's not a promise -- it's a threat) it will most likely be next summer in 7 pages. Anyway, both my favourite u/g artist and my favourite Radio 1 dj claim to have enjoyed it, but that's beside the point. /(C'mon then, don't keep secrets. Who are they?)/

Now, Tim Wallis of Bristol. My brother is chairman of the local Young Conservatives in your area, and you know what a bunch of ruffians they are when roused! Besides that though, why is it alright for Marvel to go on parodying themselves (NOVA being a classic example), but not for anyone else to parody them? The character that took the brunt in Bem-20 was Superman rather than Captain Britain, and Stuporman was, after all, merely another product from the House of Ideas. I wish people would appreciate that the comic strip form was never intended for serious artistic endeavour. Indeed, the two concepts are basically anathematic --cue Mike Cruden. /(Wha? Eh? Oh well er. Yes. I think you've got the wrong word, but I vidi your meaning, and disagree with it. Well, naturally. What something was intended for often has little bearing on what it is used for. Pictures, even a series of them in the form of a narrative, can be used to entertain, amuse, or educate. Go away, read 'Thrillkill' by Stenstrum and Adams in Creepy 91, or 'View from Without' by Adams in Unknown Worlds of Science Fiction 1, and then try to tell me that serious artistic endeavour and comics are incompatable. That is what you're saying, isn't it? If not, disregard most of the above.)/

I would imagine Alan Wright's letter last issue entertained many; I've heard of people wearing their hearts on their sleeves, but I've never before seen anyone stick it in their back pocket and sit down in a pool of blood. If it's any consolation, Alan, on the rare occasions when I'm feeling objective, I find heterosexuality quite amusing too.

I can almost imagine the planning conference God had with himself (the Holy Ghost being his split personality) when he created this thing in His image but baulked at bestowing immortality. "Hell's Bells," said God stroking his beard omnipotently, "how are we going to get them to go forth and multiply?"

"Holy Toledo!" said the Ghost, feeling in a theological mood, "I knew you should have thought of that before you invented circumcision! Hey, I have an idea! This'll kill you! Oh, sorry. Why don't we get them to ram their excretory organs together!"



"This is no time for levity. You haven't a ghost of a chance of making anyone do that."

"You wanna bet? I've invented these really neat little things called spare ribs and hormones!"

May you be struck down for printing this. Me, I don't have to worry, being a fully certified, I mean confirmed, Catholic (lapsed mid-term).

But to get back to Alan Wright, I agree that homosexuality is an extremely easy target, but then, I've always revelled in tastelessness, which is partly what attracts me to comics. You will always have my sympathy rather than contempt. What I don't understand, though, is how I could have insulted you by introducing a "stereotype homosexual man", unless of course you are a "stereotype homosexual man". Does this mean I should be insulted by jokes about stereotyped Irishmen, purely because I have Irish ancestry? But Mike has made this point already; maybe I should drop the subject before I mention something sub judice and Martin really does get struck down. All I will say Alan is that, if you really were enraged and insulted by that episode, then you truly are a bigger wet fart than Larry Grayson and John Inman put together (a revolting thought).

By the time this is printed, everyone will have seen the Superman film. I saw it yesterday (15th December), and was sorely perplexed. Why, for instance, does the film begin with some kid clearly suggesting that Superman first appeared in the thirties, when he is later shown debuting in the seventies? /(Dunno.)/ What are we supposed to make of the ending, where Superman flies back through time? He obviously didn't stop the earthquake, as Lois still mentions the gas station having blown up. Is the implication that he had just prevented that particular fissure before appearing by Lois' stalled car /(Yes)/, or had he somehow rewritten history, thereby eradicating several hours worth of semi-natural disaster? /(No.)/

Another thing. Who told us this film was strictly non-camp? /(Dunno. Salkind?)/ Gene Hackman was virtually imploring Adam West to swing in through the window and smite him over the head with a sound-effect.

The whole thing just further reinforces my belief that this sort of material cannot be done live-action. I kept longing for the dramatic lighting and powerful imagery of the Fleischer cartoons. Unless you use extremely clever lighting live-action you cannot get the proper visual effect of the musculature, and, without that, chaps in gaudily coloured tights just look silly. /(I don't think he looked silly. Everything looked right. I just wish there'd been more of a cohesive story.)/

What's more, when it wasn't being camp, this film was downright laborious and/or trite. The producers were intent on using as much footage of Brando as they possibly could. The first part of the film was actually more reminiscent of 'Mutiny on the Bounty' than anything else, with Trevor Howard recreating his 'Captain Bligh' rôle, and Brando rediscovering his 'Mr Christian' voice, as all Kryptonians spoke in an English accent.

The scene where Clark leaves the farm is so overblown and banal, and evocative of something else, that you actually wish it was Luke Skywalker leaving his farm. /(The film definitely needed more ruthless editing. No doubt the editor had it in mind that he had to produce two films out of his material.)/ Then, at least you would see some believable action, because the flying sequences in this film are less than convincing, especially as so many of them only show you part of the man of steel. And all that talk of 60-men production lines retouching wires out of frame after individual frame.

Lest you think I didn't enjoy this film at all (and you wouldn't be far wrong), I would praise Margot Kidder for playing a great part in bringing the film to life. Also, Christopher Reeve was superb as Clark Kent. Am I being bitchy, or was he cast for that rôle first?

Ian Abrahams I'm afraid your star wars article was a bit late in being published to hold any interest; it was readable, though. Pleased to see the length of Fan-Things, which was, as usual, a very good read. I was afraid that with the extra space it would become strained, as there wouldn't be enough fanzines to cover two pages, but I was wrong.

On to the lettercol, as usual the best bit of the zine. I agree with Mike to a point on the cost of GL/GA 76. Okay, rest assured I agree that it is a rip-off price, but the only thing I was trying to say was that by next year's standards it might be dirt cheap. I for one will be very interested to see the price it is given in the second volume of Alan Austin's price guide. There has been a lot of controversy over the pricing of GL/GA 76 ever since Brian Jepson sold it at £16 in F/A; Alan's pricing should sort it out once and for all, I hope. /(Do we automatically accept any price that appears in the Price Guide? If so, for how long. I seem to remember people saying that the last edition was out of date by the time it was published. Actually, I'm against the principle of Price Guides in general. For one thing, they guarantee inflation: the prices are supposed to be the average price charged for that comic. In effect, those charging the lower prices (who contributed to the average) are likely to start charging the price as per the Guide, automatically pushing up the average for next year. Secondly, they emphasize the whole commercial aspect of fandom.)/ I can't agree with Mike saying that it is mad to pay £17.50 for any comic or stamp. What in effect you're saying, Mike, is that if you were offered ACTION #1 for £17.50 you'd say it was a rip-off price! I wish someone offered me that comic at that price, 'cos it certainly would not be a rip-off price for me. /(Yes, I am saying it is mad, in the same way it's mad for the Tate to buy a quantity of bricks in the name of art. But terming such occurrences as madness does not deny the realities of the situation. From one point of view, it is mad. From another, I'd be mad not to pay £17.50 for ACTION 1, or not to ask £16 for GL 76, should I have one for sale. But despite the apparent folly of paying a fortune for something with no intrinsic practical value, I still maintain comics prices have inflated far too rapidly. People have approached me at Marts to tell me how wrong I am, and that GL 76 is certainly worth £17.50 to them, being DC's equivalent to CONAN 1 and so on. Probably subjective worth is the only realistic way to look at comics prices, or at the price of anything that is dictated by rarity--and all that the younger fans, and idealists, can do is stand back and say what a shame it is.)/

I did like the article on the Silver Age of comics, because this is a period of comics history that I personally didn't know much about. The article should have been longer, as I'm sure it only very briefly touched upon the subject. Perhaps Howard could follow that article up for a few columns, as it is a very interesting time in our history. As it is, sandwiched between the Golden Age and the comics revolution, it is only rarely mentioned. /(Probably because there is so little worth mentioning in it. Somebody referred to the period between the end of E.C. and the publication of FF #1 as the bleakest time in comics history. I think that reduces the impact of the SHOWCASE Flash, but I agree with the point.)/

Ivo Jerry Steyn Thanks very much for the back issues, which have reached me safely. Two days after that I received Bem-22, so I didn't do much studying in that week. Without the evidence in print before my eyes I wouldn't have believed it possible that so many people are into comics so deeply, so analytically. In Reaction you have for instance a beautiful discussion about Cap versus Hawkeye, Wolverine, price levels, gay lib (come again?)... Interesting, and thoroughly enjoyable.

Since Holland's prime export is opinions, I might as well add my two (or three) bits. Sorry, Miz Glancy, Wolverine is one of the sane guys in my book His remark about Storm "Going into the hole to save a life" shows, I think, that Wolv respects someone who has a rigid ethical code (like himself), even if that code is very different from his own He doesn't place too high a value on a human life, true, but so far he hasn't killed needlessly. Only when murder or mutilation was the swiftest and safest (for him and for the others) way to the objective did he let go. Okay, that's not the conventional attitude, but it is an ethic I, for one, can understand and respect. To screw this discussion up even more: who has the right to declare another man insane? (Yep, it's relativityville again.) /(So there!)/

I'm sorry to hear that HTD has been cancelled. That's the way the heroes go. HoHoHo! Speaking of heroes, does anybody agree with me that IRON MAN has become, in the space of three issues, one of the best (poly-interpretableism) comics Marvel is producing today? For me it's outranked only by AVENGERS and X-MEN. I'm very impressed by the JR jr/Layton art -- it's approaching Byrne-status! /(What little I've seen of JR jr has left me impressed. Pause. Can't anyone say anything in these double entendre days?)/

Speaking of dear John (ah, such cohesiveness in this letter), he's drawing X-MEN, he's going to draw AVENGERS, and TEAM-UP?? That idyllic situation can't last very long, and I shudder to think which comic will suffer first.

I leave you with two remarks/questions to ponder. First, is it just my unhealthy imagination, or are comics nowadays suffering from the "38-C Syndrome" again (look at Misty Knight for example and you'll know what I mean)? /(Yes, sexploitation is here to stay. Compare Power Girl with the Supergirl of the early sixties, and the extent of the exaggeration becomes obvious. These days girls have got to have enormous knockers to make it in the superheroine-biz; I wonder which writer is going to be so radically innovative as to have a flat-chested female protagonist.)/ Second, after reading AVENGERS ANNUAL 8 I believe that George Perez has no peer in comics today--this ought to set them yelling from Newcastle-on-Tyne to Nichny-Novgorod! /(Bollocks.)/

Alan Wright At last!

Batman, Wonder Woman and The Hulk all failed, either because they treated their subject like a joke, had too little money spent on them, or denied that they were about a comic book superhero at all. /(But those shows were/are all very successful. Or do you mean they failed in their transition from the comics to celluloid.)/ Superman the Movie is the first successful attempt of modern times at transferring comics to film, and it's great! The producers decided from the beginning that the film would be faithful to the legend and treat itself seriously, and all praise to them for that. I assume it was Donner who subverted that intent by introducing a camp Luthor with bumbling henchmen, straight out of the Batman TV series. /(No, I think that was in Puzo's original screenplay.)/ Perhaps it was the same person's religious tendencies that introduced the parallel between the story of Superman and the story of Jesus (some say Moses), I can't see that that added anything to the film. Those few reservations aside, I thought that it was a tremendously enjoyable and satisfying film, while Christopher Reeve is very sexy. I hope it does well--the future of comics on film may well depend on it.

In the November issue of FUTURE (≠6), David "Tribble" Gerrold writes: "those of us who consider science fiction to be something of a way of life like to pride ourselves that science-fiction people are somehow better than 'mundanes' -- that we are more forward looking, more intelligent and in particular more enlightened". Reaction in the latest BEM would suggest otherwise. A recent issue of Howard the Duck referred to attempts by Anita Bryant in the U.S. to interfere directly in the lives of gay people. She seeks to take away the few flimsy civil rights gays have fought for and achieved, and Howard's fight with the SOOFI was Steve Gerber's way of attacking her. David Gerrold went on to talk about a recent world SF convention in Florida, where many top writers, artists and fans in the science fiction field wore badges in support of gays, whether they were gay or not. "It was a small moment of unity where the SF community supported some of its own who were under attack for being different." Finally he writes: "it is not homosexuality that is the threat to a society, so much as the fear of it". 'Reaction' certainly contained letters from people frightened of homosexuality. My recent mention that being gay meant that the Howard story was very pertinent to me produced a torrent of abuse which quite honestly surprised me. Homosexuality is clearly a subject people feel strongly about--one might almost say are obsessed with.

Les Chester writes: "homosexuals are biologically flawed human beings". That would be infuriating, if it wasn't so pathetic. You come across, Les, as very frightened of homosexuality, as though it were something that threatens you personally. If you are unsure of your own sexual identity you should be criticising a society which makes it difficult to be sure and happy. If one is secure in one's own sexuality, one doesn't feel a need to attack the sexuality of others. Gay Switchboard's number is 01-837 7324, should you wish to talk this over with someone who is glad to be gay. By the way, it's our language as much as yours, Les, and we can add a new meaning to the word gay just as you have done to the words queer, bent, fruit, pansy, etc, etc.

Can I ask Ben Crozier what a "current hip publication" is, and whose criteria he uses to decide which fall into that category? Do I have your permission to quote from FUTURE, Ben, or is it "hip" (and by implication dismissable) too? Meanwhile, "to be treated by others for what (I am)" is precisely what I'm seeking, rather than to be abused simply for being gay.

I dread to think what the reaction will be to my letter in BEM ≠22, but your response, Mike, completely ignores a point I'd already made in my letter. You say "do English/Irish/Scottish people really care about their racial stereotypes" etc etc. But though people may laugh at a joke about a Scotsman being mean or an Irishman being stupid, I hope they don't really believe it! On the other hand, most non-gay people have the weirdest ideas of what a gay person is, ideas moulded by social attitudes and sexual guilt, and reinforced by the media. A recent survey in the U.S.A. found that of those interviewed it was the people who didn't know any "out" gays who were prejudiced, bigotted and ignorant. Only by exposure to gays who were out as gay, able to talk about it freely, able to smash the stereotypes, were people able to get to the truth. Captain Frog, Larry Grayson, Anita Bryant seek to reinforce the stereotypes; I'm out to smash them! And pardon me if I don't have a sense of humour about being queer-bashed, legislated against, sacked, laughed at, pitied, kicked out of home, insulted, told I'm sick or made to feel inferior, scared or unhappy; I don't think you would either. I look forward to reading letters from some of BEM's other gay readers. /(I certainly sympathise with your misfortunes, and misfortune seems far too light a word for what you list. Are you obviously queer by your appearance? If so, why? I still think you're too sensitive about people like Inman & Grayson. Most people do know someone who is a queer (or know someone who knows someone...), and who gives the lie to John Inman's implication that he is how all queers look and act. People no more believe that than they believe all Scots look and act like Andy Stewart or Fyfe Robertson.)/

Finally, may I leave you with this thought; to my knowledge no artist, writer or editor in american comics has ever come out as gay, though I enjoy speculating from writing or artistic style. If you refer to the delightful 'Bat-Mite' story in DETECTIVE ≠482 page 4 last panel, you might be forgiven for feeling that the superb artist of that strip is trying to tell us something about himself... /(Alan's referring to the sound effect, as Bat-Mite conjures an artist for his strip out of thin air. Er...does "poof" mean the same in America as it does here? -ML)/

David Bingham I've just finished reading Bemusing 22 and feel I must comment on a number of points raised in Reaction. I do not wish to prolong this argument, merely correct Les Chester on a couple of topics: one, please, homosexuals are not necessarily "biologically flawed" humans--homosexuality may also be due to psychological rather than biological causes. Two, why is 'gay' the wrong expression for homosexuals? Just because it is also used with another (literally correct) meaning has not stopped millions of people using it in this context over the past decade--why, to use a common example, do people use the word 'high' when referring to drug-induced 'trips', even though it has a different literal meaning?

Conversely, I am not defending Alan Wright's letter in Bem-21. Or his follow-up in Bem-22. Can't he see that jokes involving 'effeminate' homosexuals are aimed, not at all homosexuals, but at those who behave 'effeminately'? Unless he comes into this category, he has no reason to be offended, unless he is trying to encourage bad feeling against himself. Most homosexuals are perfectly normal people, with perfectly normal jobs--and who do not write to fanzines to publicly advertise their sexual habits. Do normal heterosexuals write to CMNI to reveal their desire for the opposite sex? Does anyone really care if Alan Wright is gay? I certainly don't.

/(Definitely the most sensible letter we've had on this subject so far.)/

Kathleen Glancy Mike's right, we should now agree to differ. Except in the case of the Vision, where we simply agree. /(I disagree. I finally got to see that X-MEN issue you referred to, wherein Wolverine killed the sentry, and that act is not evidence of everything you're accusing him of, whatever it is. Simply; is/was every soldier a psychotic, or a psychopath? Wolverine was not afraid of doing what had to be done: killing the enemy. And no, the Vision isn't a boring character (fooled yer), a machine with a human mind married to a very sexy woman with a prejudiced brother is anything but boring, but when are the writers going to realize that.)/ In any case, I want to reserve my energies for Alan Wright, that over-sensitive gentleman. I have lost count of the number of times that Chris Ash has, in his excellent cartoons, mocked at the heterosexual urges without incurring the sort of carping that Mr Wright directs at one slighting reference to homosexuality. As another person who tends to laugh at sex a lot, I am sure that Chris doesn't diversify his attitudes -- he doesn't sit down one day thinking "Today I will do a joke about Plastic Man shamelessly deceiving Sue Richards, tomorrow however I will insult homosexuals, and confuse the minds of any young boys who are uncertain about their sexual identity, by using the double meaning of 'camp' in a Captain Frog story." I think he sits down and thinks "I'll try to be amusing." And I say he succeeds very well indeed. Incidentally, while I admire Chris' work greatly I can't honestly see any boy confused about his sexual leanings turning to Captain Frog for guidance. Or even to "Are You Being Served". Mr Wright's attack on the wider media doesn't hold water either, because he confines it to comedy. Certainly there aren't any men like Mr Humphries around--there aren't any women like Mrs Slocombe either. /(Oh but there are, on both accounts. There are gays as campy as John Inman, and women as pretentious and preoccupied with their self-importance as Mrs. Slocombe.)/ In comedy, even in the characters projected by stand-up comedians, all is exaggerated. The treatment of homosexuals in serious drama is perfectly fair -- to take a famous example, I have never seen Oscar Wilde given unsympathetic treatment in any film or television incarnation. /(But can you think of a sensitive portrayal of a homosexual in fiction?)/

Mr Wright, however, seems to be lacking in gaiety, in the dictionary sense of the word, and possibly doesn't understand what's meant to be funny and what isn't. I noticed also that he makes reference to the "virtues" of heterosexuality. I have a feeling he'd be the first to moan if anyone else wrote of the "virtues" of homosexuality. In sum--if he's a believer in equality he'll put up with being laughed at sometimes, as all racial, social and sexual groups must. If he wants preferential treatment for homosexuals, he can go to California. Or, for all I care, to Hell. /(Kath, I just know you didn't mean that last bit; you care about me, I care about you, and we both care about Alan Wright, and every other sensitive, sensible human being.)/

COLIN CAMPBELL
BIYTOO BOOKS
Newsletter:February1979

Enclosed with this months mailing are details of Comicon 79 (the eleventh annual Comic Art Convention) It's already shaping up to be a weekend that no true comic fan will want to miss.
The event has moved out of London and into theNational Exhibition Centre in Birmingham.This has caused (understandably) a few raised eyebrows

Comicon is for everybody,and moving it to the centre of the country, into a purpose built hotel,negotiating low room rates and being able to offer an easy payment scheme, as well as Half Price Rail Fares, brings Comicon'79 within everyones reach.

STUDY the enclosed details:if there are any questions,don't hesitate to call.I am planning Comicon as a weekend to remember and I need your support,my contract with the hotel specifies that all bookings are to be made through Biytoo Books,so Remember the dates, Friday Aug 31st,Saturday September 1st and Sunday Sept 2nd 1979 at the Hotel Metropole,National Exhibition Centre,Birmingham.

BOOK EARLY FOR COMICON
and send all your bookings to me, not the hotel.

Ideas abound on how to make the weekend swing;with Steranko and many other guests from the UK and USA,including dealers,whatever you're planning for the first weekend in September 1979,make sure it includes Comicon '79 in Englands' second city, at the NEC just two hours by road and rail from the capital.

COMICON

Announcing the eleventh annual British Comic Art Convention

COMICON 79
Aug 31, Sept 1, & 2 1979

at
BIRMINGHAM METROPOLE, National Exhibition Centre, BIRMINGHAM, England.

Guest of Honour - innovator, publisher and artist extraordinaire -

Steranko

other U.S. Guests tentatively scheduled include MARSHALL ROGERS, TERRY AUSTIN, PAUL LEVITZ, HOWARD CHAYKIN AND JOE STATON. Confirmation of US visitors and a full list of UK guests will be given in subsequent bulletins.

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Single room supplement £3 ($6) extra per night.

SPECIAL CHILDRENS RATES
Aged 14 and under
All children must be accompanied

One child sharing room with 2 adults. Per night £5($10)
Two children in twin room. £15 ($30) per night, rates include continental breakfast.

Infant in occupied twin room - cot supplied - no charge.

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COLIN CAMPBELL

OMICON COMICON

STERANKO

COMICON '79 - PROGRAMME OUTLINE

Friday August 31st
An evening rece ption and fancy dress party to meet and mingle with US, UK and European professionals followed by a special film showing in the Metropole's Luxury Cinema.

Saturday September 1st
Dealer Room opens at 10.00am where you'll find hundreds of thousands of comics from the distant past to the latest airfreight imports, plus artwork, posters, books, portfolios, science fiction, films, slides, stills, calendars and much, much more offered by dealers from both sides of the Atlantic.

Art Displays including a special show of STERANKO's original pages from the classic Captain America 113.

Artists at Work
Instant Auction

6.30 pm. Guest of Honour: STERANKO

Spectacular Films in the Luxury Cinema

Sunday September 2nd
Dealer Room
Panels and discussions
Art Auction
Special Events
Films

DEALER TABLES

100 dealer tables: each 6ft x 3ft.
Centre tables: £32($65) +vat
Backing screens are available to hire at £4 each.
Wall Tables: £40($80) + vat

All tables must be paid for at the time of booking.

Each table includes one full 3 day ticket. Extra dealers assistant tickets can be purchased at £3 each. Max. one per table booked.
All other tickets at standard rates.

Dealer set up 6pm to 9pm Friday August 31st.
Sat. Sept 1st, Dealers 8.30am loading access closes 9.30am. Dealer Room open to Public at 10.00am.

Full dealer information sheet available with table booking confirmation.

COMICON REGISTRATION

Tickets: In advance - send by mail

Friday evening/Saturday
£5.00 —
($10.00)
(Children under 12 £2, under 5 free)

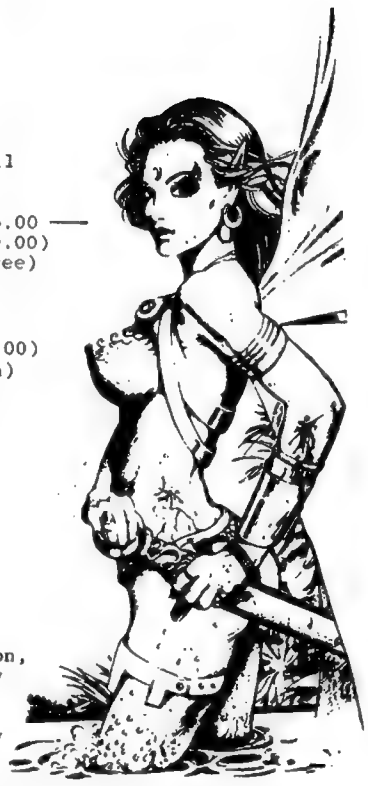
Saturday/Sunday only £3.50($7.00)
(Children under 12, 50% reduction)
(Each child under 5 accompanied by one full paying adult - Free)

½ cost period return rail fare available to everyone (in the UK, except N. Ireland) booking in advance.

TICKETS - ON THE DAY

Friday/Sat/Sun - Not available
Sat/Sunday only - £3.50
(Children under 12 - 50% reduction, each child under 5 accompanied by one full paying adult - Free)

½ cost rail travel available only to ADVANCE BOOKINGS.



BOOKING FORM

Comicon '79 is an event that I'm not prepared to miss - please book me in for:-

___ 3 day ticket @ £5($10) (includes admission to Friday evening reception) ($)£....

___ Under 12's 3 day tickets @ £2($4) ($)£....

___ Under 5's 3 day free tickets (restricted to one per full paying adult) NIL

OR

___ 2 day tickets @ £3.50 ($7.00) ($)£....

___ Under 12's 2 day tickets @ £1.75 ($3.50) ($)£....

___ Under 5's Free Ticket (restricted to one per full paying adult) NIL

HOTEL ROOM BOOKING

Indicate number of nights required:

Friday 31st, Sat 1st = 2
Saturday 1st only = 1

Any other, please specify dates, these special rates are available for one week prior to the convention and one week after.

Specific dates required.....

.....

___ persons @ £12($24) .x.....nights ($)£....
plus children - give details

($)£....
£3($6) per night single person supplement (if applies).....

Please check this box if you are booking as an individual but are prepared to share a twin room ☐

TOTAL ($)£

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Birmingham Metropole

National Exhibition Centre, Birmingham B40 1PP
Telephone: 021-780 4242 Telex:336129

The Hotel Complex at the Heart of England

The National Exhibition Centre - in whose grounds the Metropole Complex lies - is in the very heart of England. Although in unspoilt countryside, the NEC is only seven miles from Birmingham, the country's major manufacturing city.

The NEC is surrounded by beautiful countryside and is close to Stratford-on-Avon, home of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre and many historic buildings. Warwick and Kenilworth Castles are nearby, as is Coventry with its striking, modern Cathedral and within easy reach are the picturesque stone Cotswold villages.

Communication is first-class. The centre is near to the airport and is served on site by the new Birmingham international railway station which is a stop for all Inter-city and suburban trains. Road links are excellent and the NEC is close to the M6 motorway.

The Metropole, situated alongside Pendigo Lake contains full conference facilities, a luxury cinema, a pub (The Cotswold Arms), a Coffee Shop, Restaurant, Grill, Sauna, Hairdressers and squash courts.

All rooms contain private bathroom, colour television, air conditioning and are available for the Special Convention Rate of £12 per person.

COMICON '79 SOUVENIR PROGRAMME BOOK

All convention attenders will be presented with a souvenir programme book of art, articles and momentos. A limited amount of advertising space will be available; book your ad NOW; final copy deadline July 1st 1979; pre-payment due with space bookings:

SIZE:
Quarto 10" x 8"
Printed: Web offset: minimum print run 1,000

Full Page: £20($40) display area 9½" x 7½"
½ Page: £11($22) display area 4½" x 7½"horizontal
OR 3½ x 9½ vertical
¼ Page: £6($12) 4½" x 3½"

Spot colour £7.50 extra: Full colour - inquire.

Ads should be submitted as plain line copy. Any process work, eg., reverse outs, tints, screens, etc., will be subject to a minimum process charge of £4.

AUCTIONS.

The lists are open for any items that you'd like to see auctioned at Comicon '79.

Non-dealers and non-hustling fans take note: Auctions are an ideal way to offload unwanted items without the hassles of mail order or the grind of personal negotiation

Interested? then send an SAE for the Auction Application Form. Please note - there is no obligation.

John Lindley Thanks for Bem 22 -- the magazine gets better and better. Thundermole puzzled me a little; the superhero satires stood out, but why mix in the underground parody. /(Perhaps oozits was making a statement about the fact that superheroes usually represent and uphold the status quo, and could do with bringing down to earth a little, or perhaps he was paying a tribute to Shelton's Wonder Wart-hog, but basically, I suppose he felt like it.)/ Having said that, the strip halted me for five or six minutes whilst I examined all the imagery. I suppose that was the idea, "visual juxtaposition".

Hunt Emerson and Robert Crumb continued the reflection of diverse tastes.

Then I came to the letter col. Wow, did Alan Wright stir some hornet's nest by admitting that he was "gay". Incidentally, if Les Chester disagrees with that term, perhaps he would like to have a go at "red", when most communists are as pink as you or I.

Anyway, back to the comix. My favourite strip at present is "Luther Arkwright" in NEAR MYTHS. I've never been a Bryan Talbot fan, but as someone who studied history at degree level, and has listened to most of Bowie's work, I appreciate the strip--the influences at work (Tarot, Octobriana, and a taste of Dr Who) make it a very successful strip to me, personally. Bryan Talbot, like me, seems to have a dustbin mind which takes in influences, and moulds them into a mysterious pattern --proving that parallel worlds can be more interesting than Earths One & Two.

Superman "The Movie" was good, better I thought than "Star Wars", but not as good as CE3K. The Sheffield cinemas weren't blocked as they were for "Star Wars" or "Grease", so I don't think it is breaking the box office records that were expected /(I dragged Sue & myself out to see it on a freezing New Year's Night. The cinema was half empty, partially due to the weather, partially due to the night, but it still surprised and saddened me.)/

Dean Smith Before getting down to some comments about Reaction, I'll just make some comments about the rest of the mag and related topics. I loved the Hunt Emerson cover, as no doubt did everyone else who's written, and the ad for AR:ZAK Comix was a work of genius (well --almost), I'm sure it must have sold them some extra copies. /(Do you find the cover illo makes a lot of difference to sales, Mart? This was certainly the case with FT in the Manchester shops, with, ironically enough, Pete Scott's Jack Kirby-pastiche cover being one of the best sellers --and his Jonah Hex cover being one of the worst. I also loved the Ar:Zak ad.)//(I reckon that the cover illo is one of a number of variables in the sales of Bem, though the timing is also extremely important. -Martin)/

I was pleased to see the return of Worlds Of Emlock; in my view Martin ties for best fan writer with Nige Edwards, and as Nige is no longer writing, that leaves Martin with a clear lead.

I'm not sure if G. Whittaker is a real person, or another name for Hunt Emerson -- either way, I loved the drawing on page 19. Could we have some more, please. Nice to see Superswipe's rendition of Modesty as well; I've just finished reading the first strip reprint paperback, which is nice, but it's a pity they messed around with the artwork so much. Most of it's too small, and the larger panels reproduce badly. The best way of reprinting newspaper strips is definitely the "Daily Mirror" format. Speaking of "English" books --has Ruan seen the Superman and Batman annuals this year? For a change they feature all strips. /(All in colour for £1.50, too, with early 1960's material mainly. -R)/ I'm also told that there's an "Emergency" annual that reprints all the Neal Adams work for that title. /(Well, <u>some</u> of the stories that the Adams studio did for Charlton's black & white EMERGENCY magazine... -R)/

The other highlight of the issue was the Robert Crumb article. Having read nearly all Crumb's comics and almost all of the interviews he's done I didn't expect to find it all that interesting. I was very pleasantly surprised. Pete Scott is not only an interesting writer, but a very perceptive one as well. I think I can agree with most of the points he makes about Crumb, especially Crumb's feelings about sex and his reactions to drugs.

Now, what about Reaction! I never thought I'd see a letter column in a comic fanzine discussing such a wide range of ideas and points of view. Most refreshing.

However, I must take exception to Les Chester's comment that it's a "law of nature" that we should live in a patriarchal society. Poppycock! The reasons for our present society are more economical and sociological. There have been many matriarchal societies in the past, and with current trends in economics and technology it's possible we'll live in one again. /(With Maggie Thatcher as the Earth-Mother Matriarch?)/ And after all, nature herself doesn't seem to mind matriarchal societies--not if you look at all the bees, wasps and ants there are running around, anyway.

Everyone and his brother seems to be having a go at Alan Wright for his comments, mainly though they all seem anxious to establish their own heterosexual machismo, I wonder why? Personally, I find that Alan and his friends tend to overstate their case, but then I don't have to put up with endless jokes about my basic character. But ask yourself -- how would you react if all comic readers were depicted as morons as a matter of course. Wouldn't you "over-react"? We all do when something strikes too close to home.

Maureen James says that the psychological differences between men and women are important, in that once we recognise them we come to a better understanding of each other. Which is true, but even more important is seeing that those "differences" are buried in ourselves as well, and once we recognise our own "feminine" or "masculine" counterparts, we can begin to "integrate" our personalities, and real communication can begin. If anyone wants a better understanding of what I'm trying to say, I suggest they read "Man and his Symbols" edited by C.J. Jung. It's also got a fascinating section on "heroes" from Beowulf to Superman.

And speaking of books, I found the discussion of Wolverine's psychology arousing some memories from long ago. There's a scene in one of the early X-MEN issues where the Angel is describing his feelings about flying which almost matches word for word a description in one of R.D. Laing's books (probably "The Divided Self" or "Self And Others") of a schizophrenic's hallucinations. In fact, many of the hallucinations and fantasies discussed in Laing's books about schizophrenia are reminiscent of the powers that superheroes have.

And though I wouldn't like to suggest that Stan Lee had been reading Ronnie Laing, he certainly seemed to understand that side of the personality of the characters he made into heroes. And perhaps that's why we, as readers, are attracted to superheroes--they act as a release valve for fantasies that might otherwise become unbearable. /(What a pity; you blew it. Such a sensible, interesting letter right up until the end. Are you suggesting that if we didn't read comics we'd have nervous breakdowns because of the unbearable knowledge that we can't fly, and from our repeated abortive attempts to do so. Re Lee and Laing, I can imagine Lee taking the precise amount of Laing, Freud, Shakespeare, Hemingway etc to make his stories irresistable.)/

Frank Plowright You know, I'm really beginning to question the printing of advance personnel changes on the comics. Case in point: after weeks of grieving over Dracula's impending cancellation, I'd just about come to accept it, when I heard that Mike Fleisher's going to carry on with Dracula, and now I'm going through the same thing wondering whether the new writer on Hex can handle him properly. Another example comes from Bem-22. On receiving my copy I just glanced through it, before reading it completely the next day, and spent a whole day believing that MoKF, MICRONAUTS and CAPTAIN MARVEL really had been cancelled, at the same time taking pleasure in the cancellation of MS MARVEL.

On basically the same subject, I can't conceive what Martin saw in SHOGUN WARRIORS. It's the only title in the last few years I couldn't bring myself to read through. /(In case your Bem-22 isn't handy, I called it "an absolute turkey of an idea" that Doug Moench had somehow made something out of. "If you like Red Ronan, then here are three more massive, giant robot fighters with people in the head!" -Martin)/ Part of my dislike of the title is that I hate characters that can lift a leg and bring it down to trample a city. I don't buy Godzilla for the same reason, although, were the Marvel Universe real, the Avengers would surely have decimated him by now. Back to Mego toys again though, isn't it interesting how out of the similar original concepts, SHOGUN WARRIORS is so bad, and MICRONAUTS in three months has developed into one of the most enjoyable titles Marvel produces, and at the same time looks like equalling the high prices asked for HOWARD THE DUCK's first issues soon.

The meat of Bem-22 was, of course, Reaction--but only six pages?

Before joining everyone else in dumping on Alan Wright, I'd like to disprove, Mike, that men in tight flashy costumes cannot use sexiness as a counterpoint. I'm sure everyone with a TV set remembers the Williams furniture adverts of 1977, where a guy in a flashy costume with a big "W" on the chest, and an even bigger bulge in the crotch, runs off the screen saying "When you walk through the door, your pound's worth more. At Williams--where else?" Well, I recall reading in that most auspicious of daily tabloids, The Sun, that a group of housewives had formed a fan club for this guy. The only reason that the Hulk hasn't got a fan club yet, is that his trousers are too baggy. /(I think Superman's sexiness, or smouldering good looks, impressive build, and quiet confidence, was emphasized as much as decently possible. What a pity about Lois Lane. One of the film's least credible aspects was that Superman should fall for a loudmouth, unattractive bitch like her.)/

Now to Alan Wright. "Gays are never shown by the media as ordinary people." Tom Robinson & Quentin Crisp are accepted. Norman Scott, despite laying himself open to gross ribaldry has enough people taking him seriously. /(I think most people regard Norman Scott as the most nauseating pillock of the decade.)/ Okay, so John Inman is an exaggerated stereotype, yet so are the Fonz and Basil Fawlty, and there's no widespread offense over them; and out of the three gays I know one behaves similarly to John Inman. The singer Sylvester is more outrageous and offensive than any parody, and he is gay. How do you feel about him, Alan? As for the idea of sexual abnormality being an expression of sexual guilt, that's a classic. If one takes physical attraction down to its very basic purpose it's to perpetuate the human race. I'm sure I do not need to tell you that, Alan, yet by that line of reasoning mankind would have become extinct centuries ago had homosexuality been normal. Even if one accepts gays as sexually normal, which I don't, sexual abnormality still pertains to paedophiles and necrophiliacs, and I don't believe this normal, and I'm not sexually guilty because of it. I could go into Alan's letter deeper, but I really don't feel Bem is the place to do it. /(As we get deeper and deeper into this subject area, I am beginning to believe you're right.)/

I am obviously biased, being a member of the X-Men fan club, and a contributor to Cerebro, yet I cannot understand why reviewers consider the zine "juvenile", and "aimed at a younger group than most fanzines". I would agree that there is room for improvement in the zine, but the writing is of a high standard, and even if some of the art leaves a little to be desired it is not bad by any means. Maybe the reviewers feel the fan club idea to be juvenile, yet in structure it is no different from many SF clubs, and I defy anyone to call Nick Almond's articles juvenile. The Club has several name-fan (although I detest that term) contributors among its forty members, and that should stand for something. As I stated, I'm biased, but I would like some explanation of the juvenile tag. /(I've got to turn this over to Ed, as I still haven't seen Cerebro: "I don't know which fanzine reviewer called Cerebro 'juvenile' -- I certainly made the second comment you quote, but I didn't mean to be insulting. It's no crime to be young, Frank, after all. I like the idea of a fannish organisation which can attract <u>new</u> fans, and look forward to seeing the club advertising in RAMPAGE to bring X-Men readers there into fandom. Beyond that, I've got my own personal opinions; I called Cerebro "interesting", with "some pleasant art", and "quite a dedicated and enthusiastic following" --indeed, to me you sound more critical of the zine than I was.")/

Mike Gold Bem 22 was quite enjoyable -- I just wish you'd print two issues in a row at the same size. As usual, I found your letters section the most interesting, and, given my strong liking for 2000 A.D. and Judge Dredd, I found your U.K. news most informative.

No doubt by now you've heard of the latest round of changes in New York. By now, Marvel has cancelled 23 titles--the Hanna-Barbera books and the six others you mentioned, plus such well-known titles as Captain Marvel, Ms Marvel, John Carter, Godzilla, and a couple of the western reprint books (not to mention Dracula, which makes the conversion to magazine a bit early). Those of us who were present at the Implosion are happy to see Marvel helping clear up the glut on the newsstands --even though work gets a bit more tight. I'll try not to be too snide--Marvel's comics cancellations outnumber their new titles three to one, but they are expanding the magazine line. Quite simply, there's too many regular comic books on the stands, and too many of them are produced by people of less than professional talent.

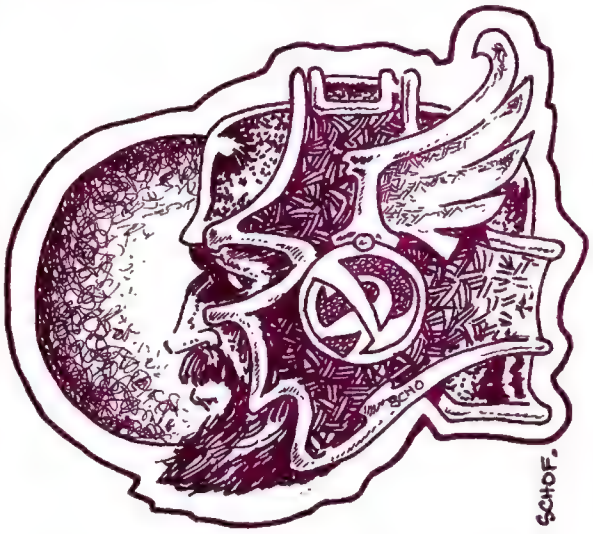
DC's moves proved encouraging--their September 1978 sales are reversing a decades-old trend: the September books, usually among the season's worst sellers, are moving better than the August books, for the first time in memory. So Marvel is adopting a similar policy--cutting back the number of titles to the more profitable (and more distributable) 40 cents. Of course, with their new-found success, DC has to go out there and tamper with it, adding a couple new titles (Swamp Thing, a mystery title, a Jonah Hex Digest and a DC's Best Digest, two new Dollar Comics, and a mess of Dollar, 40 cent and Digest sized one-shots) and putting success on the line. /(Of course, if there were only Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman on the stands, those titles would sell multitudes more than they have for decades, but I doubt that would be the answer the comics industry is searching for. Surely we live in an age of such technological and commercial sophistication that it wouldn't be too difficult to compute what balance between number of titles and percentage sold renders most profit. But, of course, it does take rational people to act on that information.)/

Phil Greenaway I trust that you didn't sue Dave Lamb for too much, Mike, after reading his treatment of you in "Wizard of Wuzter". I was going to sue him but, hell, the season of good will to all men...I think I'll wait until March before doing so. Besides, I was in a particularly good mood after going to see "Superman -- The Movie" on December 14th. I won't go into all its good and bad points...not here at any rate...I'll just say that the actors concerned gave some splendid performances -- the special effects were, for the most part, effective -- and the photography and music were superb! Definitely recommended, in my opinion. /(Yes, a very pleasant experience, actually seeing one's boyhood hero flying around so realistically; Christopher Reeve was excellent as Supes and Clark Kent, the same performance might have gained him an Oscar nomination had the rôle been less lightweight. It's a pity the film was so episodic. Editing and showing the whole story as one film, albeit a lengthy one, complete with interval, would have been beneficial, methinks.)/

I am in total agreement with John Dakin concerning his views on John Bolton's artwork. In my opinion, Bolton is the finest comic artist working in Britain today. Is it inconceivable to suggest that comics featuring his work may one day, far in the future, command the same prices as those asked for Adams material? At the recent Fantasy Film Convention, John Dakin, Rick Catilli and I were all amazed to see copies of HOUSE OF HAMMER 4 & 6 auctioned off at £5 each. Both contained Bolton material. And have you noticed how comics artists, once they've earned a degree of respect, 'progress' to illustrating advertisements? (I've seen a Bolton ad in the News of the World, as well as some material by Dave Gibbons.) Okay...fair enough...they get paid a lot better in the advertising field, but those who leave comics altogether appear to me, to be ever so slightly ungrateful. This hasn't happened in Bolton's case, and I hope it never does, as it would be a great loss. /(Ungrateful, perhaps, but you can hardly deny the practicalities. You would hardly expect Paul Macca + John Lennon to play at the Cavern (were it still standing) at their former rates. Similarly, one would suspect Frank Frazetta's marbles if he decided to do ordinary comic book work again. Nevertheless, the love of the medium keeps bringing Neal Adams back to his roots.)/

Yeah--1978 wasn't the best year for fandom. The main comic zines during that time seemed to be Bem, CMNI and Graphic Sense. This year -- with Maureen at the helm--The Comic Review could really be going places. Still, you've got to admit that a lot of low circulation zines appeared during '78...most of which were destined to last for a mere three issues. As a zine ed myself, I can appreciate the problems entailed by publishing a zine--lack of time, money and contributions. The latter can be overcome, if your fanzine becomes established. Of course, to become established your zine has got to sell well, and it appears to me that the only time this happens is at the Comicon. It's a vicious circle. You've got the finances, so you publish the zine; it doesn't sell, meaning that there'll be a gap (usually a long one) before the next issue. This in turn discourages prospective contributors from sending in anything, even orders for the next issue... Well, I don't aim to give up publishing Magus.

Bideweigh Mike, why did you bring Alan Austin into your reply to my last letter? I can see nothing symbolic in it (phallic or otherwise! That has become something of an in-joke in my school!). /(I think Alan would be deeply hurt if he knew you'd said he wasn't phallic. I mentioned him because at that very precise moment his name seemed to burn itself into my brain and I wondered what he was doing with himself these days. I wonder if that's a cue for a Beano Prize. Yes, yes it is!! The best answerer to the question "What's Alan Austin doing with himself these days?" becomes the first Beano Award Winner of 1979.)/



Pete Scott Bem-22 is an OK mag. The Star Wars feature is fairly well written, but much of it's lost on me 'cos I never actually got around to seeing SW. I must be the only fantasy fan in the whole of creation to have missed out on it. I notice that a number of reviewers in Films Illustrated recently voted it the most over-rated film of 78 however, whereas Close Encounters (an xlnt film, profound and traumatic) /(No, it just pretended to be profound. -Ian)/, was generally very highly rated. /(My vote goes to Annie Hall. -Mike)/

My own Crumb article came out all right, I think. Most of my comics-related pieces to date have been pure corn, but that one's fairly satisfactory. If I have some time to spare later in the year--I'm very busy at the mo--I'd like to write something else for you--something better.

I see that Alan Wright's letter in #21 was responsible for the exposure of some interesting private neuroses and prejudices on the part of some LoC writers. Ben M. Crozier's letter was especially priceless. I can't make up my mind if it was supposed to be funny or not, but if Ben M. was serious, he's in a bad way: "I drink excessive ale, smoke, play football, love women, spit, swear, scratch me bum without getting excited..." You can't help feeling sorry for people like that. He probably likes listening to the Stranglers too. Or the Boomtown Rats. He claims not to care "two wanks" (ah, such manly crudeness) if Alan's 'gay', when he quite obviously takes a vast umbrage to the fact; and to cap it all off he complains about his "overbearing attitude and inflexible view". As if he's any right to talk. /(I thought Ben's letter was bellylaughingly funny, and I don't think he cares that AW is queer (you choose your lexical corruptions; I'll choose mine); just that AW, martyr-like, announced it to the world. But, many people are prejudiced towards that which is different, as though it poses some sort of threat, and when the something different (Alan Wright, or blacks or Irish) start dictating what we can and cannot laugh at, then reaction becomes fast and strong. I'm probably as much at fault for taking the attitude that they (queers) can do what they want providing they keep completely out of sight. Assuming that queers are psychologically flawed, how tolerant should we be? Allowing them to express their love privately; certainly. Allowing them to express their nature publicly; okay, providing they don't make their leanings appear attractive towards often gullible and possibly confused adolescents. But accede to demands; with reservations.)/

I see from Don Macleod's letter that Alan Matheson is still living at the address I've been writing to him at. Then all I can say is that he's an ignorant bugger for never troubling to reply. That's one of my main complaints with fandom in general; the way some fans/fan-eds/dealers seem to take forever to reply to even the simplest letters.

I'm afraid a lot of the points raised in 'Reaction', though they make for interesting reading (mostly), are a bit beyond me, because I just do not bother to keep up with what's happening on the American front any more. I've gotten less and less interested in the contemporary product put out by Marvel and DC over the last couple of years and it's reached the point where the only mags I buy regularly are THOR and SAVAGE SWORD. I shan't even be bothering to get hold of the SPIRIT comics published by Krupp any more. Eisner used to be my man, but the first of their mag-sized continuation of the Warren series was really unutterably ghastly. So by and large I now buy only vintage comics. The past won't ever let you down.

Which is probably why I enjoyed Howard Siegel's 'Made in America' column. I'd like to see BEM feature more informative and unpretentious pieces in the same vein in the future. 'Unamerican Activities', on the other hand, I didn't find too enjoyable. It's quite a well-written effort, of course (BEM enjoys a fairly high level of literacy), but I've never been a great one for British comics. Some of the ones I've seen just recently haven't been all that bad--'2000 A.D. & Starlord' etc -- but basically I was prejudiced against the whole concept of British comics for years. Every time I used to pick one up it seemed to be made up almost solely of stories set in WW II; and I just don't like war comics/books/films/magazines etc. I think they perpetuate bad attitudes. Ruan Lanihorne's review of 'Battle-Action' is a fair illustration of what I mean. The second World War will soon be entering its fortieth year, and I reckon it's about time it came to an end. /(And how long has the Wild West been going on now? It seems to me that WW2 has become, at least in the U.K. and U.S.A., part of the mythology of the twentieth century; war films, novels and comics are plentiful, though becoming much less jingoistic, thankfully. SGT ROCK is a steady, worthy comic in my opinion, and from the 1914-18 conflict ENEMY ACE is a classic comics series. Similarly, BATTLE-ACTION gives us some worthwhile series, not just the mindless violence that still, I'm afraid, creeps into some publications--one recent WARLORD series seemed to specialise in killing off a "Nip" every week in as nasty a manner as possible. B-A strips like "Johnny Red", "H.M.S. Nightshade", "Crazy Keller", "Charley's War", "The Sarge", and "Glory Rider" (ironic title that) don't glorify war; if there's a market for battle action, it will be catered for, and I reckon that I.P.C. are doing a good job with this comic. -Ruan)/

Went to see the Superman film last night, the final night of its four-week run in Donny. Four weeks isn't much in comparison with the likes of 'Grease' and 'Saturday Night Fever', but I think it's quite respectable for a property based on a comic book character. The plot's not much cop and the scenes featuring Luthor's henchman are pure corn out of the old 'Batman' TV show, but in terms of photography, direction and production values the whole film is a triumph. The special fx are outstanding. Admittedly the matte work is a bit obvious in some of the flying sequences but that is a very minor quibble. In this department too the film is basically a winner. I think it's interesting to note how much dream-imagery it contains too. The scenes of flight and falling are examples of what I mean. The sequence depicting Lois and Superman soaring above the clouds; the scenes of her falling from the crippled 'copter and of Jimmy hanging by his fingertips from the edge of the crumbling dam are all very poignant. I'm sure most people must have had similar experiences in their dreams. I certainly have. /(Do you know what they symbolize?)/ The casting is also very judicious, and apart from the bloke who plays Perry White, Jackie Cooper, the players are all superbly chosen. The choice of Margot Kidder for the part of Lois Lane was a masterstroke. She's not much like the comics version of course, but her interpretation of the rôle is a delight. She's a very funny and charming lady, Miss Kidder; she'd make a great comedienne. /(I just don't think Margot was special enough to be the lady a Superman would fancy. My reaction, and I don't think I'm alone, was "what on Earth does a man like him see in an ordinary looking, pushy, heartless bitch like her?")/ /(I think the intention, which did succeed to an extent, was to make her 'foxy'. (Language corruption strikes again!) -Ian)/ Plus Chris Reeve looks as much like Superman/Clark Kent as anyone could reasonably ask. Thank goodness he cared enough to take a body-building course to develop his muscles, rather than opting to wear the padded suit the producers originally had in mind. Films featuring superheroes have tended to be rather embarrassing in the past, but 'Superman --The Movie" is the definitive entry in the genre so far. The sequel ought to be well worth the wait.

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Nige Balloch Bem was good as usual, and Fantasy Trader seems to be steadily improving. Nice to see the A4 size.

Concerning my letter and its reply from that wonderful fannish personage, MC, Mike says that we don't need a Society to produce fanzines etc; he is, of course, right. I have quite a few fanzines in my collection which have produced one issue anyway -- some even managed <u>two</u> issues. Recently there have been very few regular zines which have been successful; during the existence of T.S.O.C.E. we have established both a regular fanzine and a newsletter. /(But did <u>you</u> need a Society to do that. You appear to be one of those very energetic and enthusiastic individuals who emerge in fandom from time to time (as typified by Dez Skinn, Rob Barrow and Gez Kelly. Hmm, I don't remember us having two at once before.), who would have produced those fanzines anyway. What did the rest of the Society contribute towards those issues?)/ I wouldn't think of The Comic Review as inferior (I don't know what any version of a Zephyr looks like--so that comparison means nothing to me, I'm afraid); in its short life CR has managed to create its own atmosphere--a feeling which has been retained by Mo James. CR #5 was very well received, I expect #6 to be even more popular. A lot of people would agree with me when I say that CR is different--but it is by no means inferior. /(I didn't claim or even infer that CR was inferior -- how could I, having never seen a copy. Zephyr was a carelessly produced fanzine in common with many which were, are, and probably will be produced chiefly for ego-boosting, and whose minimal-effort style reflects it.)/ My original import scheme did fall through. Neither the Society or I can afford to set up an import service; the new system has however brought many other advantages along with it. I was originally asking £2.40 for membership subs as that was what I then needed to run the Society. I can't manage to run the Society with a £1 sub, I lowered it to get more members. I've now had to raise the sub to £1.75 and even at that price I'll be losing money for the next year -- after that the Society will be self-sufficient, and we'll be having elections for the people to organise T.S.O.C.E. Nothing was forfeited by the lowering of price /(So how did you arrive at the original admission price of £2.40?)/, in fact the members are getting more than I'd originally thought they would, and the Society is still advancing. /(What did you originally plan? What's the extra they're getting? Nosey bugger, ain't I?)/ Over the past two years I've found cheaper printers and met many people who've helped the Society in many ways, so that the Society has improved and overcome a great number of its initial problems. T.S.O.C.E. is not a registered charity--I haven't registered it for two reasons, the first reason is that I wouldn't know how to go about registering it, and the second is that it isn't a charity, it's a society that has many advantages for those who join it. /(You keep casually throwing out phrases like 'many advantages'. What, specifically, did you intend members to get for their £2.40? What, specifically, will members get for their £1.75? Free publicity, yet!)/ I don't see how it has any connection with charity. Perhaps Mr French would care to explain why T.S.O.C.E. should be a registered charity, and at the same time it might be more helpful if he knew what he was talking about before he spoke. If he sends me an SAE I can let him have full details of the Society and the tangible products which can be gained by joining. (I prefer the joke Keith Williams made, "Never mind the Sex Pistols, here comes Nige Balloch")

If Mike had read my comment more clearly, he would have seen that I wrote of the <u>apparent</u> control of fandom by a group of BNFs. /(Reading it more clearly doesn't remove the ambiguity--"apparent" can mean "manifest".)/ I have nothing against people in high places in fandom, because the only reason you become a BNF is because you have done something for fandom to gain that title. What I was talking about was a particular group of people who think they're big shots and alienate newcomers by their pretentious, arrogant manners; and writing a letter is not that easy if you feel that no-one gives a damn about what you've written. /(Arguable, but irrelevant. I, and Martin, read every letter sent to us, and I personally spend a lot of time appraising the opinions/arguments raised therein, and commenting/replying to them. I must admit, I can't figure out what you were getting at in the second part of that sentence; as for the first part, why be coy; have the courage of your convictions and name the group that you are referring to.)/

Gerald Midgley Beckenham There were five points raised in Bem-22 that I would like to comment on...

No.1. Although I do think Alan Wright is taking the issue of homosexual stereotyping for the purposes of humour too seriously, I must contradict Les Chester when he says homosexuals "are not normal and should not be treated as such". It may surprise Les to know that every man has rudimentary female organs and, more importantly, the balance between 'male' and 'female' hormones within the body is almost equal--if this were not so (it has been proved by injecting male rats with testerone) the individual would exhibit an instinctive loathing for members of his own sex.

Les also puts forward the notion that homosexuals are "biologically flawed"; while this is true in some cases, another major cause is psychological rather than physical. Every animal goes through conditioning in which he 'learns' what behaviour is most acceptable for his survival: the homosexual, in early childhood, may have had an experience which 'taught' him to direct his sexual feelings to members of his own sex. In other words <u>the homosexual personality can be evolved in exactly the same way as yours</u>; if your circumstances had been different you could have been homosexual.

I hope I have shown that, rather than being subnormal, homosexuals are simply a minority group --and not such a very small one. Surveys have placed the number of full homosexuals at between 1 in 15 and 1 in 20, while 1 in 3 people have some kind of experience, whether mere attraction to a member of one's own sex or full physical and emotional involvement, sometime in their lives.

No.2. A point that has been argued for centuries past and will probably be brought up again is the so-called deterioration of language. Jonathan Swift protested against it in the 18th century in the classic "Gulliver's Travels", George Orwell followed suit 200 years later with his essay "Politics and the English Language"--and now Les Chester! Surely language is ever-changing; a reflection of the times we live in. If the people 'on the street' use a word in a particular context and everybody recognises its meaning, should somebody be able to stand in judgement and say "the whole population is wrong, look, it says so in this dictionary"? What are your opinions on this subject? /(It's true you can't prevail against "corruption" of language (usually the complaint is against Americanisms), but grumbling about it does no harm.)//(And of course language "corruption" (I prefer to think of it as "evolution") generally arises out of necessity. As hackneyed as say 'hassle' is, it conveys a very definite meaning, very succinctly. As does 'gay', as a non-derogatory, non-clinical term. -Ian)/

I wouldn't object as much as I do about Les's views on the word 'gay' had he not committed the very same sin that he chastises Alan for in his last sentence: Why is it that people always use the word 'socialist' as a term of abuse, especially in an irrelevant context?

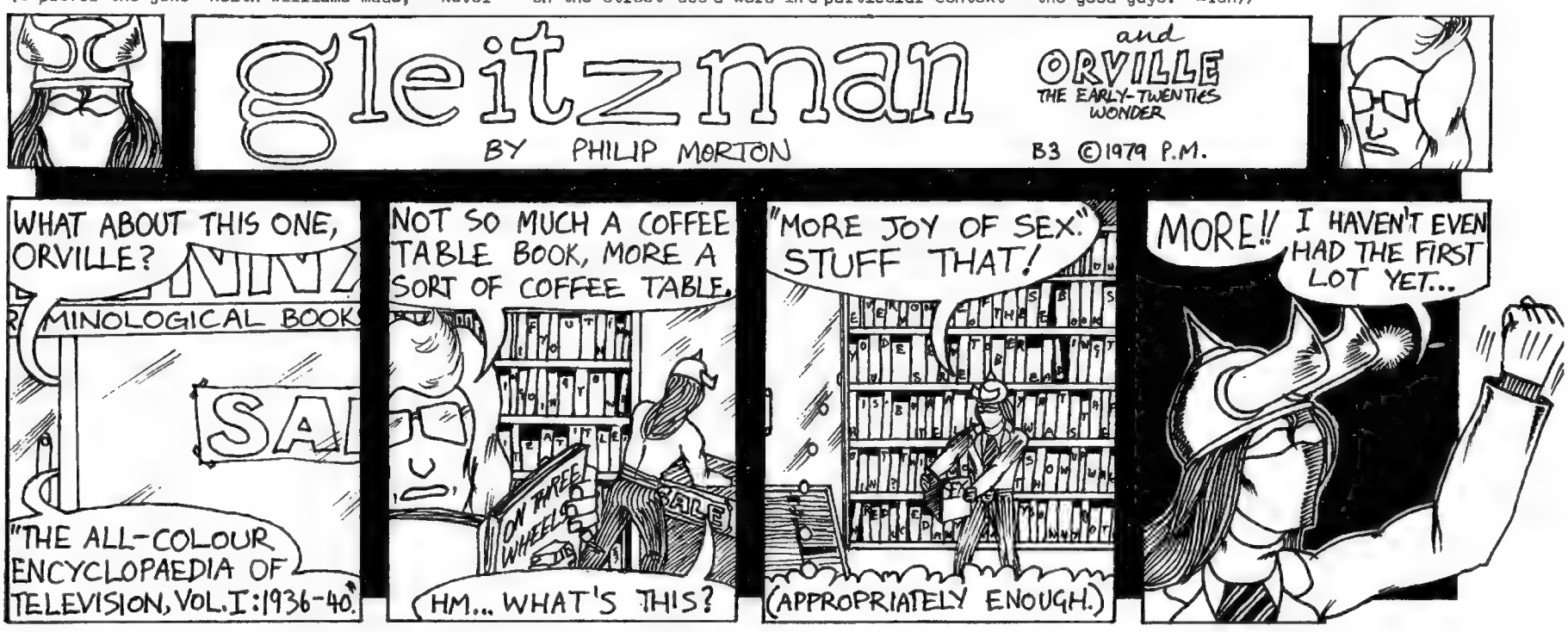
No.3. Les also assumes that the patriarchal society is the way in which "nature intended" us to live. It is true that if you ask girls if they want a partner slightly more dominant than themselves, most will say 'yes'; but is this due to basic human make-up or is it because, through countless generations of patriarchy based on physical strength, we have inherited an anachronistic set of beliefs? The idea of natural male dominance has caused havoc with many peoples' lives both male and female: men who are low in dominance cannot fulfil the rôle women expect of them, and women high in dominance find they cannot get a man with a higher level than themselves. Isn't it time to try and put a stop to this grief by eliminating these preconceptions?

No.4. I feel Reg Uspatoff, in his fictional chronicling of a Marvel implosion, was far too alarmist. Probably, the reason for DC curtailing their line was that Warner Communications felt that the money they were putting into producing comics that were giving only minimal profits could have been better invested in one of their other industries. Marvel, however, are in a completely different position; they are the most profitable company owned by Cadence, so it follows that rather than contract, their line is more likely to expand.

No.5. Kathleen Glancy asks if anyone can defend the man who shot a 14 year old newsboy. No, I do not think he was mad...merely different. At birth a man is, apart from his natural instincts, a blank sheet. /(If this were true, twins would always have very similar personalities, as would, to a lesser extent, siblings. I reckon everyone is born with at least a partial personality, that is built on as they grow. -Ian)/ As he grows older he is 'taught' the patterns of behaviour that make up his adult personality, and, depending on his upbringing, he can turn out in any one of a number of ways. You can't say that a person who commits a crime is intrinsically evil; only that he is so different from the majority of people that his continued presence in society is hazardous to the well-being of the others who, unlike him, have been conditioned to live with each other in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

I would like to finish this letter with a quotation by Steve Gerber from Howard the Duck issue 2, which sums up my last point:

"There are no heroes....nor villains, either. Merely various entities with various desires. When society approves of these desires, the entity is deemed good....or at least respectable." /(Or, as Doug Fratz said in an old issue of Comicology, "The good guys don't always win, but the victors are always in the best position to claim to be the good guys." -Ian)/



Maureen James I like the new size Bem, who was the portrait of on the cover? /(The omnipotent Bem, controlling his fanzine to please the flighty fan.)/ But seriously it's nice to see Hunt Emerson's work featured so prominently, do you think he'll produce some more? /(I'm positive he will, and I hope he'll do some of it for Bem.)/ All the regular features were up to standard, but I missed 'Sigh'. I read the Star Wars article with interest, and I must say that I agreed with most of Mark's comments. By the way, there are some SF reviews in COMIC REVIEW #7 by Mark that quite a lot of you will be interested in--so send for a copy as soon as you see CR reviewed in Fan-Things. (CR #7 should appear in April, by the way.)

The Robert Crumb piece by Pete Scott I found quite fascinating; I only wish it had been a bit longer.

And now for some comments on various comments in Reaction: Firstly, Mike, I would like to assure you that Comic Review will not be inferior to existing zines. (This comment is in answer to your comment in Nige Balloch's LoC.) I'm going to try my utmost to make it an interesting, well-produced zine; of course I know I've got a lot to learn about being an ed, but everyone's been so helpful that I'd be letting them down if I did anything but my best each issue. /(No need to be so defensive, Mo. I didn't state that CR was an inferior zine--yet you and Nige seemed to infer that I did. Your last sentence validates anything you do, and contrasts with fan-eds who are firm in their belief that they have been chosen as God's gift to fandom.)/

I really must thank everyone who sprang to my defense in Reaction -- I never knew I was so popular. It's amazing, and I really mean that. Oh yes, would you believe that whether or not I'm equal to any male members of fandom has never occured to me? But thinking about it, I'd say that anyone who takes the time and trouble to contribute to fandom is equal regardless of their sex, age or anything else. The only thing is that some people have been in fandom longer, and so have more experience. /(Being realistic, don't intellect and writing or artistic ability make some more equal than others. And, of course, both of those qualities are spread evenly between the sexes.)/

No, I wasn't deeply mortified that someone in the Bem Ballot regarded girls as a mere pastime, it was rather amusing I thought. Only one thing, I wonder if he grades them as we do comics; f, g, vg, nm, m? /(And I wonder if he'll insist on only marrying one in M condition.)/ Seriously, whoever put it down wasn't trying to offend or upset anyone I'm sure, so I took it in the spirit in which it was intended.

Note to Dave Harwood: You've never met a lady fan face to face? Well, I'm not planning any trips to Southend in the near future, but if you'd like to begin to chat by letter I'm sure Martin would forward a letter from you to me. And yes, I do attend some of the London Marts, although I only started to do so last year, and I was at last year's Comicon on the second day.

Colin French: The Comic Review isn't going to be a right load of old Ballochs--it's going to be a right load of old Mo James from now on!!

What happened to 'Whispers of Insanity' in FT this time around? Did it get pushed out by ads? /(It just didn't speak up enough. It will continue to appear, on an irregular basis, in the new-look FT though if enough good letters are sent in.)/

Theo Clarke And so to the best ever Bem -- not only because of Mike's nice comments about me, or because this was the first Bem to feature my magnificent artwork, but mainly because of the brilliant cover by Hunt and the excellent articles inside.

I suppose that I now owe you £5,000,000, but I am not going to pay until you apologise in large letters for leaving me out of the Art Credits! Just because the illo was small does not mean that I did not expend a lot of time and effort on it! I demand a public apology! /(Quick, Martin, apologise.)/ /(I APOLOGISE, THEO, FOR MY UNFORTUNATE OVERSIGHT, and can I have the money in used, non-consecutive notes if possible, please? -Martin)/

Leaving your shabby treatment of my humble self aside, this was a Bem to be remembered--I enjoyed Thundermole despite its silly incoherency, and I cannot understand why people don't like the gentle humour of Gleitzman, which I have found amusing since I first saw it in "Sennet" about a year ago.

It is good to see "Worlds of Emlock" back with us--especially with a logo by the talented Patrick Marcel.

The Star Wars article was interesting, but I do feel like having a rest from Star Wars after months of overkill. /(Martin thought you'd had a rest, and were ready for a bit more.)/

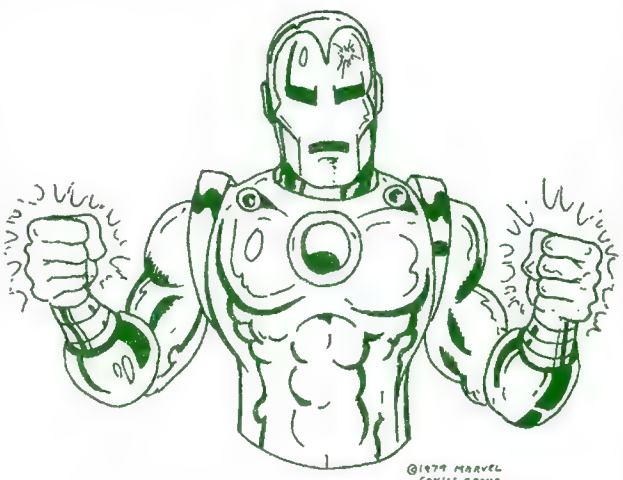
Dave Lamb's trivia section was a strong point of the zine -- I know that he has got hundreds of such useless facts written down, so perhaps this could become a regular spot.

The Robert Crumb Feature was well researched, and may bring him to the attention of a much wider range of comic fans. Similarly Howard P. Siegel may have inspired some interest in a much neglected facet of comics--but knowing the myopic attitudes of contemporary fandom, I doubt it!

Will you elicit a promise from Reg Uspatoff? Make sure that he never pulls such a fast one on us again. Shocked -- I was flabbergasted by the first few paragraphs of his column. I had not realised just how much I enjoy DAREDEVIL and MASTER OF KUNG FU, and what is more I had not really considered how easy it would be for Marvel to collapse. On the whole I found the experience most enlightening, but I doubt whether my poor shattered system could take a repeat performance!

I was glad to see that Ed used the term "real people" loosely when referring to the characters lampooned in Dave Lamb's "Wonderful Wizard of Wuzter" since it must be well-known by now that "K. Williams" is the fictitious name of a group of fans called Kate, Karen, Kevin, Kristine, Ken, Keith and Kit from Redhill. This group uses this single title to make their prodigious output seem more impressive, and their headpiece, who is depicted in Dave's strip, is a short fellow who can be seen at Cons and Marts waving a small sword for defence.

Hurrah for Ruan's good words about the impeccable John Bolton. LOOK-IN is worth the 10p it costs for Bolton's two pages alone.



And now on to Reaction, and the usual assortment of controversial letters. I will ignore Les Chester's petty, immature comments about Marvel Comics, but I am moved to anger by his comments on homosexuality. I will refrain from argument about the "fault" of homosexuality, but I do not see why anybody who differs from the norm needs "sympathy". It strikes me that comic fans are not "normal", in fact our hobby is distinctly odd, but no fans that I know need or want sympathy about their plight. /(There's a huge difference between having an unusual hobby and having a sexual orientation at odds with most of society. Sadly, being vastly different from the norm does open one up to abuse from the more insensitive members of society, and often to pity from the more sensitive.)/ Furthermore gay does mean homosexual now. Our language is, like all others, in a state of constant flux and growth -- words change their meanings, and new words are developing all the time. I would be quite happy to communicate with Mr Chester in early West Saxon, Old English, Old Norse or even in the incomplete form of Indo-European which modern scholars have resurrected, but I do not feel that it will be of much benefit to either of us, particularly because our mutual interest, comics, cannot be discussed in such languages without using modern words! "Gay" has become widely used, as an adjective meaning homosexual regardless of gender, in an attempt to supplant the old offensive phrases used by the likes of Mr Chester. /(Yes, gay does mean homosexual now, and I go along with Les in wishing it didn't. I too object to having had to erase that word from day to day vocabulary. Besides, gay seems a most inappropriate word to use, bearing in mind the fact that many homosexuals are rather pathetic individuals.)/

Also, women are not weaker than men -- although most women cannot lift as much as most men, most women can support a certain weight longer than can most men -- and any psychological differences between the sexes are largely due to differing psychological environments in childhood. The laws of nature do not dictate that we should live in a patriarchal society -- many prehistoric cultures were matriarchal, and many accorded the sexes equal status. I am quite prepared to support this argument with examples, but I do not think that many people would be interested.

/(The next bit has been deleted, on the grounds of bad taste.)/

Anyway, that's enough about Maureen. /(That's got you wondering, annit?)/ Let's discuss the next letter that elicited a reaction. Ah yes? A letter by one "Maureen James"!

Obviously there are physical differences between the sexes, but I am sure any psychological differences are the results of conditioning, as I have already said. /(You really think that most men are more aggressive, less sympathetic, more realistic, less romantic, more sexually orientated, less prudish than most women because of conditioning?)/ Also, I think that it is about time that someone revealed that "Maureen James" is a pseudonym. In fact "Maureen James" is the pen-name of Jame O'Maura, an Irish transexual who reads comics and believes that he has a pet unicorn. Remember, you read it here first!

You did misinterpret my use of "respect", Mike. I meant it in the sense of 'to treat with consideration'. On a symplistic level I was putting forward a "tit-for-tat" philosophy--that is, you can't expect people to be nice to you if you don't try to be nice to everything else. /(It's a fine idea, but you're still being naive. I'm not going to be nice to some scummish dreg of humanity (and I mean physically or mentally scummish, of course, though the two often go together), but I still expect my friends to be nice to me. Or isn't that what you meant either?)/

I don't agree with Neil Poulton that fan connections in the UK are bad--they are what you make them. I communicate with as many fans as I can cope with and one cannot do more than that. Everybody gets out of fandom what they put into it. /(Does that apply to wheeler-dealers, as opposed to fan-dealers, too?)/

I have just seen the Superman film and I think that Dave Harwood is right about superheroes being better in the cinema than on TV, although Spider-Man did not work very well on celluloid, possibly because it was originally made as a TV movie. Even though I enjoyed the film and do not really like the Superman comic, I do not think that comicbook characters can be transferred to the screen with complete success, largely because it is more difficult to suspend credibility when it is a real moving human being instead of a 2-dimensional image saving the world with one hand. Even with these reservations I would still say that "Superman -- The Movie" is the best adaptation that we are ever likely to see.

Alan Wright is becoming a trifle silly--or maybe he always was silly, but it is only just beginning to show. Sadly, his over-sensitive, over-stated reaction to a small piece of genuinely harmless fun in Captain Frog will do more harm than good to the cause of Gay Liberation. I agree that jokes about stereotypes can be offensive, but surely Alan knows some 'camp' gays, and hasn't he noticed that people who have come to terms with homosexuality make and enjoy jokes about it just as they do about any aspect of the human condition. All I can suggest is that the Gayline 'phone number is printed in the next Bem, and that the operators are forewarned about a potential flood of enquiries from muddled, gay Bem-readers!

I am sorry that Don Macleod got the wrong end of the stick about the Gormenghast trilogy. What I was trying to say was that a comic-book or film adaptation of Peake's work could not make people's mental images "come alive", and would thus detract from the pleasure of many readers by upsetting their personal images of Gormenghast. I regret not having made that plain at the time.

I will now leap to the defense of Ron Bennett; I don't know the other dealers you mention, so I cannot comment on them. I am sure that Ron will gladly admit that his prices are indeed higher than many other dealers, but his comics are always exactly as described, he always deals with orders very quickly, and he gives full refunds, not just credit, for comics that he cannot supply. /(Does any regular reputable dealer not do these things?)/ Furthermore he gives a highly personal service, for which I am quite prepared to pay the slight extra. It must also be noted that Ron is an international dealer, and comics are a higher priced commodity in the rest of Europe -- especially in Scandinavia. If people don't want to buy comics from him because of his prices, they can leave him to deal with Europeans who are glad to pay his prices. After all, he does not advertise in the U.K., so only 'knowledgeable' fans are going to know about him, except for those who meet him at marts, where they can easily compare his prices with those of other stalls. So, just you leave dear old Ron alone -- he is not a rip-off dealer, and I for one am very happy to know and deal with him. /(I think it's fair to point out, at least for the sake of any newer fans, the more expensive dealers. Isn't a rip-off dealer someone who tries to screw as much money as possible out of fans?)/

Finally, I would like to say how angry I am about an insidious form of discrimination creeping into fandom of late. This is the practise of extolling or decrying the virtues of "Big Name Fans." I feel very upset that, due to no fault of my own, I am limited to a very short name--I don't want to be ashamed of being a "Small Name Fan."

THE RISE AND FALL OF POWER COMICS

The origins of Odhams' legendary "Power Comics" began in 1964 with a 24-page humorous comic, cover-dated 20th June, entitled WHAM! Almost all of the strips were drawn by Leo Baxendale, who was also the artist for "The Bash Street Kids" in THE BEANO. For WHAM he used his talent on "The Tiddlers" (a very similar strip to the Bash St Kids, but probably an even more mischievous class), "Humbugs", "Pest of the West", and others. There seemed to be a theme running throughout the comic--that of the kids rebelling against their environment (school, officials, their parents). Maybe some would say that this encouraged the readers to do the same, but I doubt if it did.

No doubt one of the reasons for WHAM's popularity was the presence of the aforementioned "Tiddlers" on the cover. Kids seeing the chaotic classroom scenes would buy the comic as an escape from the (in their eyes) grim reality of school. Maybe that's what is wrong with British comics; they feature kids in kids' situations. When the kid grows up, it can't relate to the situations, and loses touch with comics. Perhaps if a comic was brought out featuring adults in adult situations (eg: work, driving lessons, romance etc) then maybe the comic wouldn't be classed as "kid's stuff". A character that springs to mind is "Wack" of THE SUN--maybe a comic featuring him and other similar newspaper characters might be successful.

Due to the popularity of WHAM, another comic was launched by Odhams in 1966. SMASH! was the title, and the content was similar to its companions. Several adventure strips were also featured with titles such as "Moon Madness", "Brian's Brain", and "The Legend Testers" (some of the latter was reprinted in the 1977 ACTION summer special). These strips were quite original at the time, but would now seem dated.

With issue 22, SMASH began to feature on the cover the adventures of a character who was enjoying immense popularity with his TV show at the time. It was the Batman, poorly adapted in the TV series and not treated much better in the U.S. newspaper reprints in SMASH. Nevertheless, with Batman on the cover the comic must have been very successful, sales-wise.

Around the same time, WHAM began to reprint Fantastic Four stories, starting with #1, and its companion followed suit with the Hulk, whose reprints began with #2 for some reason.

However, it wasn't only via US reprints that SMASH featured superheroes. The comic also included the adventures of Rubberman who, after being cursed by an Indian fakir, had the ability to stretch any part of his body with the exception of his head. In his search to find the fakir, and a cure, he ran into many adventures with other weird characters.

By August 1967, SMASH was reprinting Daredevil stories, which made up for the loss of the Hulk a few months later--his stories had caught up with America. The last one was from TALES TO ASTONISH #96.

Despite the ending of the popular Hulk strip, 1967 was a good year for Odhams. Three more comics were launched. POW! was very similar to its predecessors, but with slightly more emphasis on adventure strips --like SMASH and WHAM a strip featuring school kids was in evidence again, but this time it was a girl's school! "The Dolls of St Dominics" was the title, and you never met a more fearsome bunch of gals! There were a few other humorous stories in the same vein as the other two comics but no story on the cover--instead it usually showed a scene from an adventure strip inside. Spider-Man and Sergeant Fury (alternating with S.H.I.E.L.D.) were featured prominently, reprinting the original American comic covers.

The other two Odhams offerings were FANTASTIC and TERRIFIC, both of which were smaller in page size than the other three but had more pages, 40 each. FANTASTIC came first, reprinting Thor, X-Men and Iron Man (half a story per issue) and featuring a new character, "The Missing Link", in a 3 or 4 page story every week. The Link, who looked a lot like the Hulk, was later to evolve into "Johnny Future", Britain's own superhero.

TERRIFIC was born eight weeks later, with the same format; Sub-Mariner (later replaced by Giant-Man), the Avengers and Dr Strange were reprinted, with a 2-page British strip "the Living Dolls" as a back-up feature--it looked like a touched-up reprint, but from where I don't know.

It was in 1967 that the now-nicknamed (due to their cover blurbs) "Power Comics" were in their prime. They even had a "bullpen" page, run by Alf, Bart and Cos, the editors of the mags: who knows what became of them? Each comic would have its companion titles plugged on the page, which was aptly titled "News from the Floor of 64" (the editorial address of "Power"); the page would hype Power Comics in the same way that Marvel did, and still does, but it was all in fun while it lasted.

Sadly, it didn't last for long.

Early in 1968 WHAM joined POW, and soon afterwards TERRIFIC joined FANTASTIC. The combined POW and WHAM retained the Spider-Man and FF stories, and also The Cloak, Mike Higgs' excellent spy spoof, amongst others. This strip was one of the most popular stories in the comic; Mike's underground style of cartooning was perfect for the black-garbed, bug-eyed foe of evil. With his assistants Mole and Shortstuff, the Cloak would combat all kinds of weird and wonderful villains. The situations were totally ridiculous, but at the same time very enjoyable.

The Tiddlers and the Dolls of St Dominics were kept in the mag -- but with a twist. The "Tids", as they were known, had to move into a "soppy girls school", as their own Canal Road School had been burnt down. Unfortunately for the Tids, the school turned out to be St Dominics -- and after their first meeting an all-out war was declared between Tids and Dolls! A feature of these stories was a request for readers to send in their photographs, so that they could be depicted as a "guest" pupil. These guests would become involved in the battles between the Tids and the Dolls--which could become quite violent at times!

Over at SMASH during this time, Batman had moved to the interior, in black and white. The cover was now taken up by the Swots and Blots, another classroom strip featuring rivalry between the conservative Swots and the rough and ready Blots. This strip had been in SMASH since the start, but had only now been rewarded with a front cover slot.

Later in 1968, the future of "Power" looked bleak. POW and FANTASTIC merged, and then joined with SMASH, bringing the line-up down to one comic. The Spidey reprints were discontinued; so were the X-Men, Avengers, Iron Man, and Hulk, who had only recently returned to "Power" in the pages of FANTASTIC. The only remaining Marvel strips now were Thor and the FF; several old British strips were reprinted along with new humorous stories, in an attempt to make SMASH work.

It didn't.

Odhams were taken over by I.P.C., who wanted SMASH to change to be in line with their other comics (LION, TIGER etc), and so in issue 162 (dated 8th March, 1969) readers were told to "Watch out next week for the bigger, better SMASH!"

A week passed. The new SMASH appeared. Yes, it was bigger, with 40 pages, and it was "bursting with brand new thrills and fun" as advertised, but it wasn't the same comic now. It wasn't SMASH.

Power Comics were dead.

Gone were the British sci-fi stories, the reprints, most of the humorous strips and even the title logo. Even "Bad Penny" and "Swots and Blots" were not as outrageous as they were. The cover now featured "Warriors of the World", beneath a bolder but dull logo, replaced by "Simon Test" a year later.

The issue dated 3rd April 1971 announced "Exciting news inside -- don't miss it!" The news was that SMASH was merging into VALIANT the following week, to be lost in I.P.C. history forever. For the people who could remember the SMASH of old it was no loss, merely an old friend being laid to rest after being mistreated--for SMASH had died, along with "The Power Age of Comics", a long time before.

-LEWIS STRINGER

THE AMAZING ADVENTURES OF KAMIKAZE MAN Nº1 IN A DIS-CONTINUED SERIES BY ROB DAVIS

KATHOLICITY

This time, Mr Poulton, I'm quite serious.

In AVENGERS #176 the most immoral action since the heyday of the Spectre's last incarnation was paraded before the public as, apparently, a desirable development. I refer to the brainwashing of Quicksilver by Moondragon.

Quicksilver is not at all a nice man. He is a proud, arrogant, ill-tempered bigot, with a particular dislike of synthizoids but also generally contemptuous of normal humans. These feelings, while certainly not laudable, have an understandable basis. All his life he has been the object of bigotry -- as the Scarlet Witch once remarked, while she could pass for normal he never really could -- so as a natural defensive reaction he found it very easy to believe Magneto's creed of mutant superiority. If nobody around you will accept you, it must be comforting to believe you're better than them anyway. And if you're better than human, you're doubly better than a mere plastic replica of a human.

Of course his attitude to the Vision is atypical, in that he would have disliked a member of any species that had taken his precious sister away from him. There seems little doubt that Pietro's love for Wanda comes very near to being incestuous. Again, there is a reason for this. A racially prejudiced man does not seek a mate from the people he considers to be inferior, unless of course it is a case of one race being enslaved by another, when he might use the slave women for temporary sexual relief. If the people he despises consider <u>him</u> to be an inferior, however, and they are the dominant race if only in numbers...well, no way was the young Quicksilver going to risk rejection from an 'inferior' homo sapiens female. So, for all the years from puberty to his discovery of the Inhumans there was only one woman who was of the right species and age to be an acceptable sexual partner to him--if only she wasn't his twin sister. And for much of that time they were alone together, each the other's only friend. (The only other female mutant he met, Marvel Girl, was hostile to him and had her affection committed elsewhere.) He suppressed this feeling, but it showed in the obsessive, protective quality of his love for her and in his dog-in-the-manger attitude to any other man who seemed interested in her. To do him justice, it is also possible that he has valid reasons for disliking Wanda's marriage. There <u>are</u> valid reasons -- for one thing, it's not a legal marriage, since to have a marriage registered a New York resident must get a licence, and to do so must produce birth certificates proving both parties are over 18, and medical certificates showing that their blood has been tested for certain diseases and compatability with each other for breeding. Both out of the question for the Vision. Also, Quicksilver knows his sister better than anyone He may believe that childlessness will eventually make her unhappy. Or that she will become sexually frustrated -- it is all very well for Engelhart to wave his hand and say "Let's say he is physically functional, for Wanda's sake", but there is no logical <u>reason</u> for an artificial being which cannot reproduce to be made capable of normal sexual intercourse. It seems fairly likely the Vision isn't so capable, which is very unfortunate for him since he is programmed with a human mind and may well want to do what he physically cannot. The other Avengers always struck me as being over-optimistic about that marriage.

Even so, Quicksilver is not a nice man. Narrow, uncompromising, prejudiced, and probably incestuous. To someone brought up away from the seamy side of humanity, indeed, the touch of his mind must have been like a quick dip in a cesspool. It was, nevertheless, <u>his</u> mind. And nobody, much less a woman who is a bigot herself, had any right to lobotomise him, which is what Moondragon's action really amounted to. Quicksilver's bigotry is deeply ingrained in him, a part of his being that has been consistent in all his appearances though muted at times--what he got was no simple flash of 'insight' but a drastic change in his whole personality--no wonder he's been so quiet since.

I may be wrong in reacting too soon to this incident--it is my hope that Hawkeye, who protested vigorously when he witnessed it, will take up the cudgels again as soon as things calm down a bit--but in case it is glossed over or never mentioned again, I feel someone ought to say it was wrong. Especially wrong in the suggestion that bigotry is an easily curable thing. It isn't. All of us are bigots about something--do you not, in your heart of hearts, believe that even though all races are equal, <u>your</u> race is that little bit more equal? That <u>your</u> country is more beautiful? That your home town, your school, your football team, your favourite book/comic/film/television programme is better than anyone else's? Happily, in most of us bigotry is small and harmless. It can't hurt anyone if I believe Edinburgh is a better place to live than Glasgow, and the type of person who believes that same thing and would attempt by physical violence to convert any Glaswegian who naturally thinks the opposite is, thank God, very much in the minority. But the rabidly intolerant are never going to be cured overnight. Only in a very slow process of education and assimilation is there any hope. Had Quicksilver been shown beginning however reluctantly to listen to the voice of human tolerance which in the somewhat surprising person of Hawkeye (though come to think of it Hawkeye was the one to offer comfort on the occasion of the Vision's first encounter--as the Vision--with human bigotry, and when he got mad with the Vision it was always because of what the Vision had done, never because of what he was) was seeking to persuade him of the error of his ways, and then slowly mellowing over the next couple of years, that would have been acceptable. And slightly more realistic.

A final thought -- Crystal, however inexplicably, fell in love with Quicksilver as he was. A tolerant Quicksilver is no longer the person he was. So it is possible that Moondragon has managed to wreck his marriage, as well as raping his mind.

And for this she expected to be thanked.

-KATHLEEN GLANCY

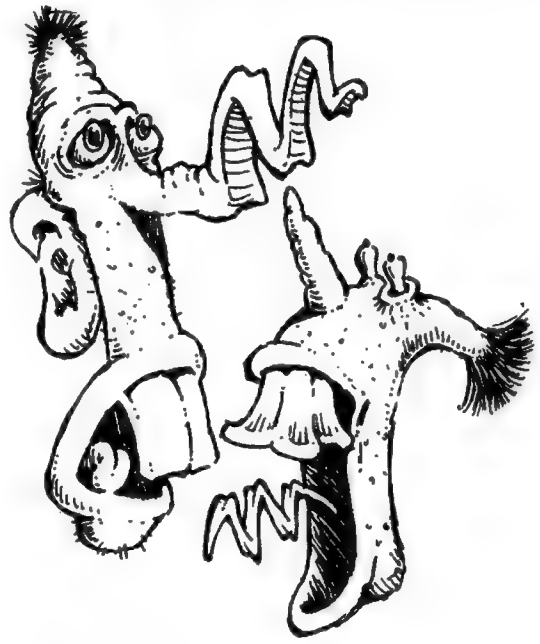
SIGH

LIVING IN AN UNSTABLE COMICDOM

Greetings, fans! Yes, Sigh is back again --but for how long? As you may (or may not) remember, last time Sigh appeared (in Bem-21) it was to say why it was going to <u>continue</u> appearing... This time it's to say why it may <u>not</u> continue appearing. Who says this isn't the KW Age of Khaos and Konfusion?

Basically, the problems are as follows:

1) Time--the universal enemy. Now that I produce my own zine, albeit only for Phil Greenaway's apa, not for general distribution (Ever met General Distribution? Nice chap. Friend of General Knowledge...and Major Part...and Corporal Punishment...and Private Property, &c &c) (sorry 'bout that), as well as still turning out articles, reviews, etc, for various zines, I find it getting harder and harder to meet deadlines. Now in most



cases this doesn't matter too much, as most fan-editors can't meet their official deadlines either, but Martin, being the super-efficient computer-cyborg he is, doesn't suffer from this problem. Hence it's my Sigh col for Bem that tends to get left out, while cols and things submitted late to other zines still manage to sneek through... First problem.

2) Energy, lack of. In addition to exhausting my <u>time</u>, the aforementioned 'fanac' (as the ugly phrase has it) tends to exhaust <u>me</u>. While some of my stuff is done during my 60-odd hours a week in the shop, there's always more besides, in what's laughingly referred to as my spare time. In my youth perhaps this wouldn't have taken the stuffing out of me, but at the grand old age of twenty-something (I forget now...), I find I just can't hack it, to coin a phrase. So, every now and then I have a 'rest' from fanac for a day or two (or four)...and woe betide anything that ought to be completed during that time... Second problem.

3) Lastly, and possibly more significantly, demoralisation. Now this, you'll be relieved to hear, is where comicdom itself comes back into the picture. You know the saying "Stop the world! I want to get off!"? Well, that's how I feel about comicdom sometimes. The way things happen so fast and furiously that I just can't keep up. A couple of the more obvious examples that spring to mind: I write about the proposed new 50c format which,

having given it a little thought, I decide I could get happily accustomed to, given time--almost immediately it's dropped and replaced with the old size for 40c. I write that I think it's just as well that SWAMP THING isn't to be brought back -- almost immediately it is brought back after all.

There's no stability anywhere...nothing ever happens according to plan. It seems to go something like this: A project is announced in the newszines -- so I start considering the implications of it, weighing up pros and cons, etc; next ish of the newszines, amendments are made to the previous announcements (different format, personnel, &c)--I mull this over; next ish it appears that certain technical difficulties (such as fierce squabbling) are delaying the project, which incidentally may now appear in the originally-intended format after all--I try to remember what the original format was supposed to be, anyway; next ish, due to drastic changes in company personnel (several top people having moved to another company), this and various other projects are suspended indefinitely, while things are sorted out--I stop thinking about the project in question and start thinking about the personnel changes instead; next ish, no news of that project or the other suspended ones, but instead a whole slew of new ones--I start thinking about these, and forget entirely about the first project, which I assume to be dead; next ish it's announced that the aforementioned project is to be completed shortly, but in a new format and with different... YAAAARGHH!

You know that feeling? 'Course you do. Now you try writing about comics against that sort of background...

"John Smith has successfully ruined the once-great Mr X mag -- no mean feat, even for him, but somehow he's managed it... Seems to me that its days must be numbered now." "Oh, K?" "Er, yes?" "Mr X has just been cancelled." "Oh... Well, just goes to prove what I was saying, doesn't it? KW borne out again." "Oh, K?" "Er, yes?" "It seems Mr X is to continue after all, but with Frank Jones taking over the writing, and Fred Evans on art." "Oh... Well, it was really only because of John Smith that I wanted the mag cancelled, probably with Frank Jones writing it it'll be okay." "Oh, K?" "Er, yes?" "Seems Frank J. can't do the scripting on Mr X after all, because of his other commitments. He just did half an issue, and handed it over to Sid Anderson." "Oh..." "Oh, and K?" "Er, yes?" "Seems he's going to try and clear up all the inconsistencies between John Smith's version and the previous one, in a long involved serial bringing back The Mad Timekeeper and The Flying Wombat." "Oh... Er, well, I'm glad at any rate that someone's going to try and iron out these inconsistencies, which of course have been a source of considerable annoyance to many of us. Perhaps once that's out of the way ..." "Oh, K?" "...Er, yes?" "They've cancelled Mr X again." "WHA-A-AT?!?...But, you said..." "Look, don't blame me! I only report the news you know. Seems there's been a shake-up, and they've decided they have got to axe half a dozen or so books, and that's one of them." "......I wonder why I bother.....?"

Don't you wonder why I bother? 'Course you do--in fact, a lot of you have asked me why I bother, which is yet another reason I may not continue, of course.

However, all that being said, I may still persevere with this column (Martin permitting)--after all, as I remarked last time, I do enjoy writing this rubbish, er, stuff. But if I don't...well, at least you'll know the reasons why, okay?

Will we meet again next time? Only the Shadow knows... -K. WILLIAMS

As you can see mes amis, I am steel...'ow you say? Knackaired from my epeec adventure in Bem 20! So, while I take a long rest in Minehead, I 'ave asked one of my staff to entertain you wiz a leetle article called... "ALL IN COLOR FOR A DOLLAR -- COMICS AND THE 10 YEAR ITCH" by Chris Ash!

"Perhaps I've changed. Perhaps I've grown older and lost the innocent accepting quality of a child. Or perhaps the changing times are to blame...the Justice Society in its guest appearances with the JLA just does not match its old magnificence of the days and the pages of ALL STAR COMICS."

Thus mused Jim Harmon in the days and the pages of 'All in Color for a Dime' (ace books, 1970). He was, of course, referring to the original ALL STAR of the '40's and, although the JSA stories of those times may well have had more atmosphere than those of the '60's (or maybe that only pertains by virtue of their antiquity), they were far from magnificent either visually or literarily.

Like Jim Harmon, I too am growing older, but instead of sitting around thinking how fab comics were in the '60's, I am deeply concerned about their future.

The reason the super-heroes of the '60's were so much better than their counterparts of twenty years before was because of their enforced hiatus during the 1950's.

In his appreciation of Captain America's early career (History of Comics 1, Supergraphics 1970) Steranko makes these telling points: "He had failed to fulfil the command of natural law: growth. Somewhere along the way his dignity had tarnished. The glory was gone." It's my opinion that that glory was succinctly recaptured by Lee & Kirby in 1964, and misplaced again round about the time Colan & Sinnott quit drawing the book, the same year that the above quote was published. This was also the wretched time when Lee became publisher at Marvel--but more on that later.

The commercial nosedive in superhero books at the end of the '40's was an undisguised blessing. To apologise for them, as many people have, by claiming that comic book artists of the period were true primitives, forging a new art form/system of communication or whatever, is pure horse manure. Compare their products with any of the contemporary work of Raymond, Foster, Eisner, Capp, etc, and it is abundantly clear that the comic book artists for the most part were second (nearer fourth) rate hacks. To put it bluntly, there was a direct inverse relationship between quantity and quality. Sound familiar?

With the cut-down in comicbook production at the end of the forties, the dead wood could safely be removed. Those artists remaining in the business had to go through the proverbial shaping-up -- or shipping-out. By that time, though, a new generation had been reared on the work of the quality (small 'q') newspaper strip artists of the '30's & '40's, resulting in the emergence of a group like EC who were able to call upon the services of a few, young, highly talented draftsmen. Once again, the inverse proportions of quantity and quality. As has been noted, that decade was not kind to the superhero, but although he may not have known it, this was exactly what he needed. The ten-year break provided a period of reassessment. It allowed standards to change, a new generation to emerge, hindsight to develop. It created a breathing space--one in which the old order could be consigned to a different dimension, or radical remodelling, or merely memory.

Thus, at last, the comic-book creators of the '60's had some raw material to work from. Suddenly they had traditions, a sense of history and the fresh optimism of their powerful new projects to play off against each other. The treats were multifold, and I hardly need to list them. The tremendous improvements in draftsmanship apparent were matched by the new dimensions Stan Lee brought to scripting and plotting. Classics abound in the so-called Silver Age making it the true Golden Age. The classics, it has to be said, were fewer at DC. Again the inverse ratio of quantity to quality. Marvel, the smaller group (like EC before it) was able to concentrate its creative efforts in a way which accomodated its limited scale of operations.

We are now approaching the stage where the rot sets in. At the end of the '60's, Stan Lee, casting the former (viz Atlas Comics) wisdom of his uncle aside, becomes Marvel publisher and immediately seems to triple the number of titles published. Since he is no longer chief editor, former standards are summarily abandoned. Thanks to Stan, the 'Marvel message' is finally getting through to the general public. But, simultaneously, it is a message which no longer obtains. And that was the frustrating thing about the early '70's. Marvel had the publicity, but they no longer had the product. While Stan was swanning around the world telling everyone how great his comics were, back at the ranch the cowboys were having a field day. Promotion, though, had always been Lee's forte and consequently, by aiming more squarely at the younger reader, Marvel was now in a stronger position than ever.

While this expansion was going on, an inevitable decline took place at DC. But this was only in the number of titles being produced. Jack Kirby was just the breath of fresh air and powerful personality that DC needed. Unfortunately, the ridiculously excessive praise the Fourth World received then is partly responsible for Jack's fall from favour today. That and too much editorial freedom.

Anyway, despite DC's aesthetic upswing during this period, they have still produced little of note during the current decade. Even the JLA is unreadable now, largely due to Frank McLaughlin's inking. The logical conclusion of his progress on this book is to have every panel solid black, broken only by the occasional caption or word balloon. The stories are actually quite reasonable, though.

It is generally true that the few worthwhile DC/Marvel comic books of the '70's have strayed away from the standard superhero idiom (again a list is unnecessary). This is because the formulae of the '60's revival had worn dangerously thin by the turn of the decade. Unfortunately, most of the incoming 'creative' talents of the past few years were raised on these formulae and see fit merely to slavishly follow them, producing only pale shadows of former glories.

I shan't labour the point any longer as I'm only depressing myself. Suffice it to say that it's my contention that the 10 years on, 10 years off cycle that appeared to evolve in the '40's, '50's and '60's was a worthwhile development for the superhero syndrome, and that a radical rethink in terms of product and packaging on the part of the major American publishers would do everybody a big favour.

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Fan-Things

Sometimes, it all reminds me of a plot for a "Fourth World" type epic...

It is a time of unrest in the galaxy. The powers of the old heroes have waned--their creations have long become inactive. Depression, Apathy & Inertia rule the universe, and any new fanzines that dare to appear are soon cowed into submission. The lifeless husk of the old Fantasy Advertiser drifts forlornly in space, many other once famous names are missing, and Bur-Ton's once regular zine is overdue. Will it join Alaustin's Comics Unlimited and the fabled Panelologist in oblivion? The last fortress of the forces of light is the fourth moon of Worcester, from whence the sleek Emlock ships still set forth regularly--but how long will it be before these Bright, Excellent Machines are caught by the creeping, nameless enemy of all fandom? Will the light of freedom gutter and die...?

But wait! All is not lost. As the last of the master printers paces the floor anxiously, the wall lights up--help is on the way! The fleets of Gezkelli have been sighted, heading to attack the Apathy Star --and one of the master printers has come back into action, his world slowly coming back to life...and the legendary champion of fandom, The Mighty Edwoods, has freed himself, and soars back into the sky! Is the crisis past? Can we breathe freely? Will I ever get down to reviewing a fanzine or two? Read on, friends...

Well, Richard Burton assures me that COMIC MEDIA NEWS INTENTIONAL ≠39 (45p for 28 A4 pages from Richard

will be out soon, though the bone-crushing hours he's having to work at Marvel UK hardly leave time at present for CMNI. (And yes, getting the name wrong <u>was</u> international--er, I mean intentional...) George Barnett promises to revive PANELOLOGIST on a regular basis --the first new issue will have 8 A4 pages for 10p in shops 15p by post from George

and George plans to produce these "slimline" Pannys either monthly or bimonthly, starting in late March. Subscribers will get two of the new 8-pagers for each old-size issue they were owed.

Next, Gez Kelly continues to set fandom on its ear. GRAPHIC SENSE 28 quarto pages for 25p

≠4 has a 4-colour cover by Keith Luck, and an extra colour on some inside pages too; there's a superhero team strip by Dave Edge & Keith inside, columns by Mo James, Dick Domar, Mark Chadbourn, and Theo Clarke, and lotsa neat stuff -- and it appears regularly! However, Gez now has another zine in his charge, slated to be published MONTHLY; as Bem subscribers will know, since they should have received a copy with this issue, Martin has joined in the popular sport of "pass the adzine" (mainly indulged in with MEDIA) by handing FANTASY TRADER over to Gez. The new FT will have five times the circulation, and be sent out free with a number of fanzines including Media, Graphic Sense and Bem--but with its monthly schedule, to get every issue you may need to subscribe. An "add-on" subscription to FT, if you're a Bem subscriber, is 50p, which will mean you'll get five issues <u>with</u> Bem and the other seven <u>between</u> Bems as well. Send your hard-earned cash to Gez, or to Martin at Bem's editorial address--and if you're not a Bem subscriber, a cheque or postal order for £2 would kill two birds with one --er, cheque or postal order? Oh, by the way, he said coyly, FT now has a regular column called "Fanhunter", written by me with help (I hope) from you. So subscribe, or pick up a copy in your favourite comics shop--it'll have masses of ads of comics for sale, marts and so on too!

And Nige Edwards, onetime favourite fan writer, fan-ed, funny man, and bon vivant is back--why, he's in this very issue of Bem, the fanzine he was associated with from issue 3 on, rising to the heights of assistant editorship until Bem-15. Also planned are columns by Nige in MEDIA and COMIC REVIEW, I gather.

And new fanzines do appear, too -- I've mentioned Lew Stringer's AFTER IMAGE ≠1 before (see ad on page 6 for details), but the appearance of a 2-page "supplemental" is a good excuse for another plug. Lew needs to sell a few more copies of number one before he can put out AI ≠2, which will have contributions by Dick Domar and David Hobden as well as Lew himself when it appears -- if it appears! To make sure AI does continue, I'd suggest you invest in AI's premiere issue right away!

DWELLERS OF THE UNIVERSE ≠1 (24 A5 pages for 20p from Michael Harris, 146 Highfield Way, Rickmansworth, Herts) has the 12-page debut of a hero group by that name, from Paul Nero and the art team of penciller Dave Hornsby and inker Bob Watkins, along with "Scorpion" by Michael Harris and Bob Watkins again, this time on full art. It seems a promising start to an ambitious project -- DotU ≠2 is to have 32 A4 pages for 30p, and be out around Easter -- the address for money is Dave Hornsby.

Bob Dunn

asks us to mention that he's starting a business to sell books and magazines connected with newspaper comic strips and cartoons; see his ad in Fantasy Trader, or send him a s.a.e. -- well, since he sent in a sub to Bem at the same time, we're glad to help! And Meiron Jones

says he's preparing a "sci-fi orientated" fanzine, due out around Easter; the cover stat he enclosed looks really nice...

FANDOM ≠6 12 A5 pages from Eddie Walsh,

is a good mixture of sales list and fanzine, presumably still free for an s.a.e.--my favourite part was the fanzine review section, with 14 different zines reviewed in a candid yet friendly manner, but a lettercol has started now, and I'm sure there'll be even more in the April issue. Eddie is doing a good job for us all here, exposing his mail-order buyers to fandom -- this sort of publication can do more to keep the fanzine scene going well than many a slicker magazine.

DOOMZINE ≠1 I've seen now 20p plus 7p stamp for 20 A5 pages from Jonny White, and I see it contains some nice work by Martin S. Forrest and Pete Scott on the art, and Gary Pugh and Mark Chadbourn on articles, along with a 2-page strip full of caricatures of lotsa fans -- a wide variety of features, and an enjoyable read.

You may have a copy of OGRE ≠1 already (free for an s.a.e. from Colin Gould,

for 12 A5 pages), as it was sent out free to Graphic Sense subscribers--if not, you're missing a couple of editorials, a page of self proclaimed "utter nonsense", profiles of Frank Frazetta & Edgar Rice Burroughs, and short pieces on marts & sales figures, all by Colin (except the "utter nonsence" --Luke Rainford helped there), and some good art by Luke, Avram Buchanan, and Alex Evans. At the price you can hardly go wrong, can you?

But it seems a long time since I last gave a plug to The Comics Heroines Fan Club, the American organisation for which Martin is U.K. agent. The main fanzine is THE HEROINES SHOWCASE (60p by sea-mail or £1 by air-mail direct from California for 36 6" x 9½" pages--send orders and money to Martin Lock at the Bem address), and ≠15, the latest I have to hand, spotlights Clea (by Cat Yronwode, illustrated by the excellent Lela Dowling), "The Last Wizard and Red Sonja Show", "The Secret Lives of Betty Cooper" (Archie's friend), "Tiger Girl" (written and illustrated by Trina Robbins, no less!), Miss America (in the 'Golden Age Girls' series by publisher Steve Johnson), and Hellcat, plus a few features and art by George Perez, Frank Brunner, and others less well known but almost equally accomplished. You may see this zine in specialist comics shops if you know where to look -- otherwise send Martin some money for a trial issue, or £2.40 (or £4 by air) for the next four CHFC publications -- which should include the second "UK Heroines Showcase", whose contributors include Kathleen Glancy, Mo James, Ruan Lanihorne, and Superswipe! The first issue went out as part of Bem-9 back in May '76, by the way...

CAPTION ≠3 16 A5 pages for 18p from Trev Hylton,

is in need of more articles, reviews and illos, Trev says--though with art by Dave Hornsby and Bob Watkins, and a 3-page lettercol, he's not doing so badly. But he needs your backing to keep the zine improving, okay?

Now, time for a T.S.O.C.E. paragraph. To join The Society Of Comics Enthusiasts for the rest of 1979 costs £1.45 (in March --in April it's £1.25), to be sent to Nige Balloch.

You get a newsletter every month, cheap copies of THE COMIC REVIEW, various discounts, and other neat stuff, such as with the March mailing APOCALYPSE ≠4½ free of charge! And as we grow in number (154 at the latest count), so the whole idea expands... I previewed CR ≠6 last time, so I haven't much to add; the panto is priceless, especially the Chris Ash art, although for some reason the picture of me looks more like Martin--and when have I been "disturbingly familiar" to Chris? It's not as if I'm that heavy a drinker! ≠7 sports a John Mould cover, and inside the contents include Paul Jay's excellent 'Anthony' strip, Phil Greenaway on "Superman--The Movie", "Dealers Diary" by Nige Edwards, "Whatever Happened to Spider-Man" by Ian Abrahams, and Bill W. Ryan's retelling of "The Origin of Solar-man", plus the usual features. That's in 24 A5 pages for 20p to members or 30p to non-members from Nige--though letters etc about CR should go to Maureen James.

It's a good fanzine.

VERTIGO ≠4 18p for 32 A5 pages from Barry Winetrobe,

also meets that description, with a diverse selection of reading, including a Colan appreciation, women in barbarian comics, 'Supermania', Archie Goodwin's issues of DETECTIVE, and "What If Enid Blyton wrote the X-Men", a completely ridiculous tale that quickly got me laughing out loud. Dave Hornsby did the cover--have you seen his ½-page strip in the sf (etc) magazine AD ASTRA, which also contains a strip by Bryan Talbot?

DARK THEY WERE & GOLDEN EYED MAIL ORDER CATALOGUE for winter (56 A4 pages for 50p from DTW&GE, 9-12 St Annes Court, London W1) arrived recently -- lots of sf books, comics galore, and specialist items for sale, with plenty of cover repros of books and comics and related art. Really lovely browsing material -- and cheaper than the tube ticket in to visit the shop! Bram Stokes and his merry band are charging only 25p for 40c comics, by the way, to the annoyance of competitors who'd like to charge more!

LULU REVU, plugged here last time, is merging with something called FANTARAMA, at 6 issues for $4.00 from Pubbug Press Publications,

meanwhile LR ≠4 is "bubbly with enthusiasm" about Bem, so Em is hoping for a flood of orders from North America. The only other UK fanzine reviewed is WARK ≠12 -- come on, fan-eds, send out a few more review copies! With only THE COMIC READER, BEM and FUNNYWORLD getting Lulu's coveted 'recommended' star this time, Martin's head may well get too big for his new pair of stereo headphones if he's not careful!

I gather Colin Campbell has rented the Bem centre-spread to Tell All about this year's Comicon; he can't publicise the films booked due to the hire terms, but take my word that it's a good line-up! The arrangement to get cheap train fares is an excellent idea -- and any Londoners too faint-hearted to take an 80-minute train-ride out of Euston will be missing the high-point of the comic fan's year--and extra added American dealers will make it the best chance to track down those missing issues this side of taking the sky-train to New York out of Heathrow.

GALAXY Z ≠3 has appeared, after a gap of over a year 20 A5 pages for--oh heck, your guess is as good as mine...20p?--from Phil Hartley,

with strips drawn by Nick Neocleous, Bob Watkins (who drew the cover), John Matthews, and Martin Dutton (whatever happened to Bem's 'Pencer Trak' serial, Mr D?); try not to take so long next time, hey, Phil?

Teaser time: which well-known fanzine (not Bem) will be type-set throughout in future, and generally slick and full of colour? Make your guess and send in your sub, as the price is rising too...

Tecgwd

"The East Clandon Great Whaling Disaster" issue 5 includes "The Superman Enigma", Chris Reeve Interview, news, gossip, reviews, fandom comparisons, a big letter column, fiction, art, and more!

Issue 5:20p, Issue 4:15p plus P&P
From: Sceiron,

But CROM ≠7 30p by post for 24 A5 pages from Mark Bilsborough,

has arrived, so here's my promised review. First of all Bils has managed to embarrass me by giving a favourable mention to AETHER -- SF but, since he hadn't got the zine's address to hand, he says the details are "bound to turn up in Fan-Things". Ghulp! What's an AETHER -- SF, and how does one obtain it? If anyone out there has the answers, can they please let me know? A nice free copy to review wouldn't go amiss, either...But CROM itself is up to the usual high standard, with lots of excellent artwork by Nick Neocleous, featuring scantily clad maidens and brawny barbarians. There is only one sword & sorcery tale this time, "The Double Edged Sword" by Rob Young, but 8 pages of letters, 3 pages of reviews of art books and heroic fantasy, and 3 more of fanzine reviews all add up to make this another very satisfying issue.

As usual, half the fun with issue 33 of FANZINE FANATIQUE 8 A5 pages for 17p from Keith Walker,

is figuring out which order to read the pages in, but once that's sorted out there are 3 good fanzine reviews per penny, which has to be pretty good value!

Keith is also UK Agent for New Zealand's NOUMENON (10 issues for £3.00 by sea, or £6.30 by air mail--this issue's 40 7½" x 10" pages long), and ≠27/28 continues the mix of opinions, news, letters, columns, and other SF-type bits, including a feature on SF music focussing this time on a French group that I'd never heard of -- Magma.

Don't say I don't give you good warning --a Convention to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the launch of EAGLE is being planned for Saturday 12th or 19th April 1980, at a central London hotel. It seems to be an A.C.E. (that's the British comics nostalgia group spear-headed by Denis Gifford) event--send a £1 cheque or postal order to Roger Bayliss (Eagle Con Secretary).

CLOSER TO THE EDGE ≠3 (14p for 4 A4 pages from Steven J. Green, "Ad Astra",

is an unpretentious little stencilled zine; it contains a short bit of horror fiction and Steve's "Reality Plus" column on sf and comics fanzines & events. ≠4 must be due out by now...

CEREBRO ≠3 35p for 20 A4 pages from G. Willmetts,

is very similar to ≠2, reviewed last time; like Mike Cruden on T.S.O.C.E., I'm curious to know what the benefits of an annual subscription to the Official X-Men Fan Club are, at £3.00, beyond six issues of CEREBRO, a membership card, and "access to offers, comps., etc" --but everyone seems to be having a good time, so if the X-Men are your favourite team, buy a copy and leap right in.

MAGAZINE OF TOMORROW ≠2 22p by post from Graham Bleathman,

for 24 quarto pages features an article on the Gerry Anderson comics, such as TV 21, Graeme Bassett on "The Survivors", an assortment of accomplished art by the editor, a spoof "Stingray" strip, and a few other goodies--a promising, improving, worthwhile zine. Graham is looking for TV21, Joe 90 and Lady Penelope comics, by the way -- if you've got any around you'd like to sell, get in touch with him.

And to end with, TALES OF CREATION ≠3 22 A4 pages for 25p from Joe Matthews,

has a fine line-up; the strips are by Bob Watkins, Kevin Sutherland and John Matthews, while Alan Hunter did the cover, and other artists along include Phil Elliott, Mike Matthews (no relation), Steve Gibson, and Dave Byrom. There's a serial by K. Williams, and Ruan Lanihorne interviewing me -- what more do you need in a fanzine? ≠4, due soon, is to be a Red Sonja special, Joe tells us. A good note to end on! -ED SALLIS

ART CREDITS

Chris Ash: 9, 23; Brian Bolland: 1; Dave Byrom: 26 (right); Mark Castro: 4 (middle); Rob Davis: 21 (strip); Hunt Emerson: 22; Martin S. Forrest: 2 (left); Mike Golden: 2 (bottom); Dave Hornsby: 20: Alan Hunter: 27; Martin Longley: 4 (bottom); Mike Matthews: 11; Terry Moore: 4 (top); Philip Morton: 19 (strip); Billy Mulraney: 8, 13; Russ Nicholson: 26 (left); Martin Noone: 19 (top), 25 (logo); Luke Rainford: 8; Tony Schofield: 17; Lew Stringer: 2 (rt); Superswipe: 25; Bob Watkins: 16; Geoffrey Whittaker: 3 (logo); David M. Windett: 12.

Review section

GHOST RIDER ≠35 (April)
"Death Race" by Jim Starlin & Steve Leialoha

If you look along the spine of this comic, you can see that the cover was drawn by Budiansky and Rubinstein, although at first glance it resembles Starlin's work in almost every aspect. This is, in my opinion, the finest cover of 1979 so far; the five shapes are laid out perfectly to give maximum power with the minimum of cluttering, Budiansky has produced one of the most eerily realistic skulls I have seen in a long time, and we are given a breath-taking view of the night sky that compares favourably with Starlin's art on the covers of RAMPAGING HULK and MARVEL PREVIEW.

Turning to the story, we can see the real advantage of having a writer who can also lay out a page. There is no way two separate people can co-ordinate pictures and words as well as this--even Moench and Gulacy on MASTER OF KUNG FU could not capture the strength and mood presented here.

Jim Starlin's imagination is truly amazing. Faced with an 88-word speech by a single character (interrupted only once by 3 words) that is to be spread over 5 panels, most artists would despair. However, on page 7 Starlin uses a theme--reflection. The second panel is Death's motorbike being reflected in water, the first and third panels are the heads of Ghost Rider and Death facing each other, using the second one as a mirror, the fourth panel is GR reflected in Death's glasses, and the fifth panel looks down on the two cyclists, so that they parallel each other's positions in an imaginary line.

Steve Leialoha's inks and Petra Goldberg's colouring blend beautifully with the art; as far as possible all blank sheets of 'pure' colour have been eliminated, leaving mainly browns, greys, and murky greens. This, combined with the extensive use of black, generates a true atmosphere of fear --something that I have rarely experienced in a comic. I would even go so far as to say that I felt actual repulsion; especially on page 6, with the standing profile of Death (panel 1), and the ¾ view of Ghost Rider's head (panel 2).

Something that I marked in particular was the return of 'shaky' word balloons. Aesthetically, they are much more pleasing than the squares drawn in previous issues, as the symmetry of these is incongruous with the 'random' quality of natural landscape, and the curves of the human form.

The basic idea of the plot is good (a personification of the 'death wish' theory), but I am not altogether happy with the scripting, even though it is better than most of the other work around. I realise that the majority of Marvel's comics are aimed at a 9-14 age group, but Starlin could still have removed such clichés as:

"Hey, Ryder, I've news for you! I've had it with your game, so you can just--EAT HELLFIRE!" and,

"Death is coming for you, and... Death never loses!" But the most annoying thing of all is the cheap sentimentality to try and arouse the emotious: A full-grown man is killed in cold blood by Death Ryder, while, a moment later, GR is allowed to save a 'cute' little girl.

All in all, I feel that this is the best issue of GHOST RIDER to date; yet I'm still waiting for a writer to explore the full potential of this book, and use it as a vehicle for psychological, social and religious commentary. -Gerald Midgley

THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD ≠149 (April)
"Look Homeward, Runaway" by Haney & Aparo

After a few changes in editorship, B & B might as well still be edited by Boltinoff for all the difference it makes. But there's no arguing with success, and this comic is one of DC's most steady sellers--and yes, the scripts are competent, and the art is always good, but it just doesn't move me at all. I guess it's the status quo of it all, it doesn't excite or even raise a slight interest, the team-ups could be anybody (this time it's the Teen Titans), and the plots interchangeable with one another. For all it matters I could be reviewing any issue, any story, any team-up, and that really sums up the utter mediocrity of it all.

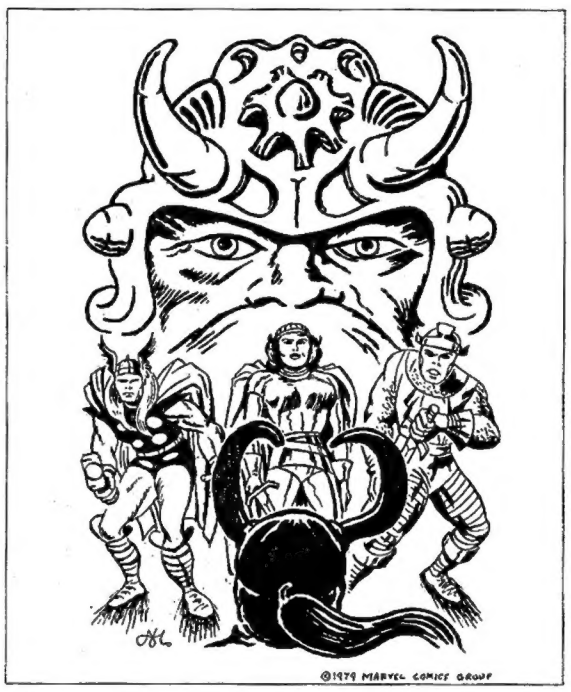
B & B is true disposable reading, ephemeral entertainment to be absorbed and expelled before the next meal comes round. -Nige Edwards

2000 A.D. ANNUAL 1979 (£1.10, 128 pages)
DAN DARE ANNUAL 1979 (£1.35, 96 pages)
SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL 1979 (£1.50, 64 pages)

Oooh, goody! Look what I got in my Christmas stocking. Spider-Man Annual was incredibly good value, a bumper 64 pages for a measly £1.50. The one tale featured is a team-up between the Torch and Spidey against Mysterio (from SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL ≠4); the other 20-odd pages being a couple of Not Brand Echh sketches and a few pin-ups. All in all, a super ten-minute read, in colour too.

I had difficulty in working out why the Dan Dare Annual cost 25p more with 32 pages less than the 2000 A.D. one, since there wasn't a large difference in the number of colour pages--however, out of the two, I prefer the Dan Dare Annual. Apart from a really excellent Rick Random strip (let's hope he gets a regular spot in the weekly soon--all-new, that is), there's an amusing Dredd tale and a Dan Dare strip which explains why the Dan Dare in 2000 A.D. differs from the original that appeared in the Eagle comic of yesteryear. It also gets rid of Digby, his batman, and the whole tale is very interesting. I just wonder why the last panel of Dare makes him look like a 70-year-old Japanese. The other Dan Dare story seemed to borrow from Star Wars a bit too much for me.

The only things worthy of note in the 2000 A.D. Annual were a macabre little story called "Food" and another 'blast from the past' called "Guinea Pig". All the rest of the annual was only interesting in its abominable mediocrity. -Gordon Smith



WHAT IF ≠13 (February)
"What If Conan the Barbarian Walked The Earth Today" by Thomas, Buscema and Chan

So what if he did? Conan travels to New York, 1977--experiences culture shock, gets shot at by a cop, meets a lady taxi-driver who is a rather odd judge of character (she remarks "you seem kind of harmless somehow"!!), travels home with her as she decides she can relate to him, while "relating" picks up the meaning of "yes" and "no" (!), fights some looters and a gang of crooks who are all exceedingly rotten shots, says his farewells, and is returned to his own time. Ho hum. At least he doesn't team up with Spider-Man. -Robin Webster

WHAT IF ≠14 (April)
"What If Sgt Fury Had Fought World War Two In Outer Space?" by Friedrich, Glut, Trimpe & Marcos

"...da dum da dum... Nige Edwards, the drunken reviewer, his chosen mission, to explore strange new comics, to seek out new concepts, other ideas ...to boldly go where NO FAN HAS GONE BEFORE!"

Damn right too, since any comic fan with even the slightest modicum of intelligence and good taste will have avoided this like the proverbial plague, or even Sale of the Century. What an absolute waste of time, effort, and paper -- Sarge Fury set to Star Wars. What was the point of this issue? None, as far as I can see. Previous issues have been somewhat trivial, but this is the pits, writer Don Glut has made some easy money with his scripting, substituting aliens for nazis, spaceships for tanks, lasers for machine-guns, and a computer for a commanding officer. Trimpe's art is fairly tolerable, but the whole comic spells out "pathetic" and "silly".

And what incredible and startling plot do we have for next issue -- "What If FOUR Different People Became Nova?" Oh, the shock, the thrills, the drama, the overwhelming pathos of it all, I can't stand it, my heart's not strong enough...

Now for my own personal What If--"What If What If was cancelled and replaced by a different comic ...and the sooner the better?"

THE CRUNCH ≠1 (January 20th, 1979)
D.C. Thomson & Co Ltd. Price 10p

This is a regular 32-page D.C.T. weekly, with six regular stories in the first issue. If you like adventure stories you should like this.

"Arena" is the title of the first strip, and is the story of a 21st century prisoner destined to be a gladiator against all sorts of horrors. Of course he'll live through all his battles, but it is still quite a nice strip.

"Hitler Lives" is an enjoyable yarn, concerning Hitler (him in the war, for non-history buffs) and his escape from Berlin in suspended animation. This is one of the best concepts in the "paper".

The others are good--but not exceptional. "The Kyser Experiment" has wonder footballers without injuries--what is Kyser's secret? "Mantracker" is a modern red indian bounty hunter; "The Walking Bombs" are kamikaze secret agents with H-bombs in their chests; "Who Killed Cassidy?" is the aftermath of a Kennedy-style presidential assassination; and "Clancy and the Man" starts in issue two, with a couple of American policemen.

Not bad for 10 pence--but aimed at boys of about ten years old. -Stephen Bailey

MARVEL PREMIERE ≠47 (April)
"To Steal an Ant-Man" by David Michelinie, John Byrne & Bob Layton

Mm, interesting... However...

1st question: Do we need an Ant-Man? The original article wasn't all that successful, if memory serves -- that's why he was changed to Giant-Man, no? And then to Goliath, to Yellow-Jacket, back to Ant-Man, back to Yellow-Jacket, et cetera... Super-smallness may sound a good gimmick in theory --but in practise there's not an awful lot you can do with it. Or, rather, not a lot you can do with it that hasn't already been done, by the Atom, Doll Man, Shrinking Violet, the original Ant-Man, and so on. Still, on the other hand, you might argue that there's not a lot of shrinking heroes about at the moment (Atom appearing infrequently, Doll Man not at all, etc), so maybe there's room for one...er, except that we've now also got the 'pre-shrunk' Micronauts... But, in any case, even if there is a vacancy for an Ant-Man--

2nd question: Why do we need a new Ant-Man...? Surely, after all these years and all his different IDs, ol' Hank Pym must have built up some sort of following...mustn't he? Why bring in a stranger to fill the rôle, and complicate matters further? So that HP can stay as Yellow-Jacket, or whatever he is currently? But that means we've then got an Ant-Man and a Yellow-Jacket, and of course the Winsome Wasp. Isn't that getting just a bit repetitive? (Is Marvel about to go 'bughouse'?)

Question 3: Even if there's room for a new Ant-Man, does he have to be another reformed crook? Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against reformed crooks...it's just that Marvel is already bursting at the seams with them:- Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, Quicksilver, Black Widow, Banshee, Falcon, and Nighthawk, to name but a few.

What else? Well, where Iron Man had a failing heart, and Spider-Man had an ailing aunt, by way of handicaps, this chap goes one better--he's got a dying daughter. In case you hadn't guessed, this gimmick definitely turns me off.

Perhaps I'm a little jaundiced -- the thing is, after all, quite well drawn and well scripted--but it strikes me as yet another wasted effort.

Still... Interesting... -K. Williams

Marvel Comics Series: THE INCREDIBLE HULK
Wyndham Pocket Books. 75p.

Ahh, those were the days. The early sixties, when things like deadline dooms and writer/artist change-arounds were few and far between. In a nutshell, the days when you could depend on consistency.

Even though we have had much more sophisticated material in comics over the last few years, these first six Hulk issues still stand out. Why? These stories were simple in plot structure, and yet they held something quite important that has more or less been lost at Marvel in the late seventies. It shows you that most of today's writers have forgotten that the main aim of comics is to entertain, but not to underestimate the intelligence of the reader.

To put it bluntly, back then Lee had it sussed! The scripts had humour, twists, action, and style, which is something not many of today's comics writers can put in one story.

Sure, some of the naivety in the stories is a bit ridiculous, especially the 'Cold War' as portrayed in issues 1 and 4, but then so are a lot of the concepts featured in comics today.

Suffice to say, the fact that one can read these stories in 1979 and still be entertained, and somewhat impressed with them, says quite a lot for Messrs Lee and Kirby. I look forward to the next dip into the past with these excellent paperbacks, which are great value for money, with superb reproduction and colour. Recommended. -Jan Garczynski

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